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THROUGH
THE LONG NIGHT

BY

E. LYNN LINTON

AUTHOR OF

'PATRICIA KEMBALL,' 'THE ATONEMENT OF LEAM DUNDAS,'
'IONE,' 'PASTON CAREW,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BOOK THE FIRST.

TWILIGHT.

THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

THE 'SACRA FAMES.'

Preaching down a daughter's heart was not a difficult task to a mother like Mrs. Clanricarde. Circumstances compelled her conduct and character strengthened her resolve; and, when conditions and feelings are in accord, there we have that triple wall of brass which no human power can break down.

We will enumerate the conditions and circumstances which made the mother preach down her daughter's heart. These were:—An unbusiness-like husband who never realized a security but he lost, nor moved an investment

but he lessened it, yet who, believing in his commercial 'flair,' was always dabbling in the stock and share market for the benefit of everyone but himself;—The love of luxury and the enforced privations of genteel penury;—The pride of ambition and the consciousness of gradual social decline;—The irritation, coupled with contempt, natural to a clever woman keenly alive to the mistakes of her partner, yet powerless to prevent and doomed only to suffer;—The mother's natural desire that her daughter's rare gift of supreme beauty, utilized as her dowry, should be the means of placing her beyond the reach of that grim wolf so closely investing her own homestead. All these created that 'auri sacra fames' which made Mrs. Clanricarde as hard as iron, as cold as ice, and as cruel as death in the matter of Estelle's present love and potential marriage. It made her as one stone-deaf to the alternate hymns and threnodies of love poured forth by Charlie Osborne—as handsome as a Greek god and as penniless as a church mouse. It made her as one stone-blind to Estelle's tears and sighs and loss of appetite and slightly faded

bloom—save that this last indeed aroused in her a certain secret anger which was the sworn foe of pity. For this depreciation of her capital was as heinous an offence in Estelle, according to the mother's way of looking at things, as were Mr. Clanricarde's speculations in the House, whereby a thousand became five hundred, and percentage was the 'peau de chagrin' which every touch made smaller.

In this momentous question of her marriage, Mrs. Clanricarde assumed to know better than her daughter; and perhaps she was not far wrong in her assumption. Charlie Osborne had everything that a romantic girl adores, but that a far-seeing mother despises as the foundation of the home and family. And with Mrs. Clanricarde the mother's outlook overlapped the daughter's romance.

It made no difference in the ordering of things that no eligible parti was at hand to take up the silver thread, which she was resolved Charlie Osborne should not hold. The two moneyless curates, the one scantily-endowed squireen, and the rosy-gilled doctor who made up

the bachelordom round about Kingshouse, were not a whit more desirable than this impecunious Eudemon, and not half so charming. And Caleb Stagg, the only son and heir of old Miles Stagg, the wealthy owner of Redhill and a former coal-miner, was impossible—at least to Estelle, if Mrs. Clanricarde would have shut her eyes and swallowed the gilded sausage whole. But the chapter of accidents has a long coda; and the chapter of accidents in the life-story of a lovely girl of twenty has only just begun.

‘It is of no use, Estelle,’ Mrs. Clanricarde would say in her high-pitched voice and petulant French intonation; ‘it is of no use to cry and make a miserable face. If you marry Charlie Osborne you will marry into misery; and I would rather see you dead than go through what I have done.’

‘If only you would believe in his future, and let us wait!’ pleaded Estelle, tears in her large soft eyes which were like big brown moths lying within a white seashell.

‘His future! What of it? Child, how fatally touched you are with these stupid English

notions!' said Mrs. Clanricarde warmly. 'What *is* this young man's future?'

'Fame,' said Estelle; 'and fame is always fortune.'

'Fame from what? A picture hung by the Royal Academy?—a drama accepted by a theatrical manager?—a poem published by an enterprising publisher?—and none of the three strong enough for that success which includes a banker's book! That is the future of your handsome Joconde who aims at eagles and does not bring down even sparrows! And, out of these, where, I ask you, is the *pot-au-feu*?'

'You misjudge him, mother; you do not give him credit for what he is,' said Estelle, doing battle for her beloved with gentle persistency rather than overt spirit. 'He can be great in anything he undertakes. He is great already; only the world has not yet recognized his genius, as it will later—as it must.'

'My dear Estelle, you speak like an ignorant child as you are. Real genius is concentrated, and does not go squandering itself abroad on everything alike,' returned Mrs. Clanricarde,

sensibly enough. 'A universal genius is a fated failure, and never rises beyond mediocrity. He is always close to excellence, but never actually touches success. He is always just the line short. The golden water which is to fill a dry trench must run through a broad pipe in one flow, and not filter through a dozen little pin-holes like a watering-pot. And we want our dry trench filled, Estelle; your poor miserable father has taken care of that!'

Mrs. Clanricarde never lost an opportunity of impressing on Estelle the contemptible delinquencies of her father. To the jealous French mother the daughter ought to belong to her exclusively, and she did not approve of divided sympathies. Besides, that patriotism which means opposition to the present condition of things, counted for something in her jealousy; and the French woman born and bred and never sincerely naturalized, for all that she was as English in speech and manner as anyone else, did her best to prevent her daughter from becoming too Britannic in her ideas. This daughter had already imbibed that fatal poison

of belief in love and romance which ruined half the English girls and shamed the common-sense of half the mothers ; and Mrs. Clanricarde's one great desire was to root out these pernicious weeds from Estelle's mind, and plant in their stead wise views of social life and a just estimate of the creature-comforts to be got by money.

'Girls are so silly!' she used to say, curling her thin mobile lips into that expressive line of contempt which only such lips can take. 'As if love can pay the rent, or kisses feed the children!—as if the husband matters one jot so long as he has money and knows how to use it!—as if I would not rather have married a veritable gnome than this wretched creature of mine, with his six feet of folly and his barber's block of vanity!'

It did not mend matters that Mr. Clanricarde was secretly on his daughter's side in this matter of her young love, seeing that for peace' sake he was compelled to be openly on his wife's. Taking his own disastrous way as he did in the manipulation of the family funds, which had

been unwisely left in his sole control, he made a point of following her lead in all else; and while he was ruining her fortunes by his mania for bad speculations, and alienating her affections by refusing to listen to her advice, he made himself so supple, so sweet and tender in the home that, although she despised and disliked him heartily enough, she had no more power to find cause against him—outside opposition for its own sake only—than she would have had to crush an indiarubber ball. His prompt acquiescence in her repudiation of Charlie Osborne as a husband for Estelle almost made her waver in her own decision. If George could see good reasons why it should not be, the chances were those reasons were bad, and the other side might have something to say for itself. But maternal prudence was stronger than even conjugal dissension; and, after the wife had eased her mind by a few sniffs and sneers at the husband, the mother went on as she had begun, and Estelle was no nearer her desired destruction than before.

Despite the opposition and the vigilance of

Mrs. Clanricarde, the lovers met in secret as well as openly in society; for it would have been impossible to keep Estelle shut up in the house or to demand the social ostracism of Charlie Osborne. And, as people with gardens will give tennis-parties and strawberry-feasts, the Clanricardes were forced to go to them with the rest, and take the consequences ensuing. The alternative of leaving Kingshouse was also an impossibility. The domestic money-market was too tight; and those last investments had restricted it yet more. Hence, the matter was one of those problems which even the most skilful diplomatist among matrons finds it hard to solve; and in the game of chess between love and prudence for the possession of the fair Estelle, no one could as yet foresee which would be the winner.

And indeed she was fair—taking the word as beauty, not colour. Somewhat above the middle height—straight as a palm-tree but supple and slender as a willow-branch—graceful as a fawn and almost as shy—she was one of those women to whom poets write sonnets and musicians

dedicate nocturnes; one of the women who make brave men braver still, and weak ones yet more self-indulgent. In her character the two main streams of womanly feeling ran side by side—the gentlest and most captivating reliance on those who were her superiors by age, sex, condition; and the power of self-sacrifice for love. She was woman—pure womanly throughout. Body, heart and mind were essentially feminine—feminine with all the strength and all the weakness of her sex and type. Weak to the strong and strong only for love, her love was of the kind which justifies itself and redeems its own excess—whole-hearted, passionate, unselfish, and pure as flame is pure. Pliant before a firm will, quivering beneath a brutal hand, she yet had that kind of courage which could brave the world, the law, and the commandments, should he who needed her and whom she loved, find himself on the outside of virtuous convention. Submissive as another Lucy Ashton to authority, she had that power of revolt for the sake of another which belongs to a certain kind of gen-

tle and tenacious nature—that power which not even the mother who bore her suspected, and which would be shown only when called forth by circumstances.

Meanwhile, as things were, she was to all appearance just a shy, gentle-mannered, pretty English girl with a foreign name and face: tightly held by her mother; secretly adored and openly neglected by her father; as secretly worshipped by the one scantily-endowed squireen and the two impecunious curates; frankly admired by the rosy-gilled doctor; and frantically beloved by Charlie Osborne, who saw in her his tenth Muse, his Egeria, his good angel, and the one absolute necessity of his life. And save that she met her handsome lover in secret, and let him say things which would have made her mother furious had she heard them—more furious still had she heard the girl's replies—she obeyed her mother in all things: especially in the one grand essential of not marrying a man who could not keep even a servant, not to speak of a wife, and whose sole possessions were beauty, love, poetry, art, that delicacy of mind

which belongs to the artistic temperament, and a constitution which was decidedly fragile and on the line of something worse. Just so much grace of common-sense had this young man, and no more—he did not urge Estelle to run away with him and begin life and housekeeping on that one hundred a-year, which was all his fixed income. Of course in the future he would be a rich man, because a famous one. That was as certain as the rising of to-morrow's sun, to him as well as to Estelle. Pending that certainty, however, he was forced to hold his hand and hope for the best. No one else was to the fore at Kingshouse—Caleb Stagg being impossible; and with this negative comfort he and she must be content.

Kingshouse was not a rich field for the adventures of life or the vagaries of fortune. The scenery was beautiful in a quiet, sleepy, rural way; the old-fashioned country town was quaint and stagnant; the society was restricted, and the income-tax collector did not cover much ground. Save Anne Aspline, whose mother had been a successfully-married cook, not a girl had

twopence-halfpenny for dower money; and, save Caleb Stagg, of Redhill, whose father had been a miner, not a man had more. Charlie Osborne, the son of the late vicar, stood a head and shoulders above them all for personal charms; and the bachelordom of the district, so sparsely represented on the tennis-ground, did not touch him in all that makes a young man desirable and dangerous. So that Mrs. Clanricarde, while she repudiated the handsome genius sent back to his native place because his constitution could not bear the exhaustion and bad air of London, had no other string to her slack bow. And, if the love that could be had was undeniably supperless, the love that was wanted was as undeniably bodiless.

So matters stood in the pretty village town of Kingshouse, when this story opens and the serious play was about to begin.

CHAPTER II.

THE CYMON OF KINGSHOUSE.

NOTHING, to the high-nosed, blue-blooded gentry of Kingshouse, seemed so contrary to the providential ordering of things as that the heir, par excellence, of the district should be a man like young Caleb Stagg—the heiress a girl like Anne Aspline; though, indeed, in this latter case, the girl was well enough, taken by herself. It was the mother who was the stumbling-block, albeit not of a very formidable kind. With Caleb, on the contrary, the disabilities went all the way, like a rope coiled round him; crushing the social vitality out of his otherwise vigorous condition, and reducing what should have been beauty of circumstances to a mere shapeless mass of inert uselessness.

As good as the proverbial gold in his essential nature, and with a really fine, if limited, tract of intelligence, young Caleb was as heavy as lead in his bearing, and as dull as so much unpolished pudding-stone in his conversation. He had inherited his physique, but not her blunted intellect, from his mother—a plain, honest, straightward kind of creature, good for her man and her child, apt at scrubbing and washing when she ceased to be a pit-brow woman, but always stupid at cooking, and absolutely unteachable for her needle—a creature who had not a personal charm so soon as she lost the fresh complexion and plump firmness of youth; and who had not an ounce more brain than just lifted her over the line of the ‘half-baked,’ and enabled her to keep her boy from harm and her house from dirt. She had transmitted herself to Caleb; and, like mother, like son, in all things save the absolute quality of the brain. For Caleb was as heavily-built and as round-limbed as she; with the same light grey eyes, coarse sandy hair, fresh red and white complexion, small snubby nose, and large, full, fleshy, unpoetic lips. And

what kind of social credentials can be got out of such an inventory?

To add to this heavy handicap of nature, the strong character and close grip of old Miles had wrought on both wife and child the usual effect of domination over comparative flaccidity. It had crushed out of them all such initiative, all such spirit, as might have been developed, at least in Caleb, had he been under a more elastic rule and allowed a freer seaboard.

A man of character and shrewd intelligence, but utterly untaught, Miles Stagg was what the country people were wont to call a queer fish and a rough customer, or, perhaps, a regular Tory, when he got drunk—which was oftener than should have been, but not so often as might have been expected. As a set-off, however, he had that comprehensive quality known as a good heart—that is, if he broke a man's head he gave him a golden plaister wherewith to mend it. And to be free with his fists and open with his hand seemed to the former miner as fair a division of things as a reasonable man could expect.

Having come to his abundant wealth by the lucky chance of a fine seam of coal in the bankrupt co-operative mine which he had doggedly taken on his own square shoulders, he came to it unprepared by training or even by anticipation ; and now, with his hundreds of thousands, he was never more than the miner in his Sunday clothes, well brushed up and with all the grime washed off, but with his heart in the skip and his interests on the bank. Naturally, however, he thought his money would do, if but little for himself, much for his son—more, indeed, than it would. Seeing where it had landed this and that and t’other, he thought that he, too, had but to command, and the social forces would obey. But he did not take into consideration the difference between himself as represented by his son, and those others who had brushed themselves up into passable imitations, if no art nor science ever yet discovered could make them the real thing. Miles was but Sly the tinker in my lord’s best bed ; and the freaks of fortune are no more really metamorphic than those of great men. Sly may surround himself

with costly luxuries, pillow his scrubby head on satin, eat dainties out of a golden plate, and splash his spatulous fingers in rose-water afterwards. He may clothe his hirsute body in velvet and embroidery as fine as an emperor's, —all the same, the rust of the pots and pans he has passed his life in tinkering will not leave his horny hands; and Plutus himself cannot make that silken purse we wot of out of a pig-gish ear.

Unfortunately—or, perhaps, fortunately—who knows yet?—young Caleb had none of his father's social ambition. Specially did he in no wise share the old man's wishes about marrying blood and founding a family. Lady Elizabeth Inchbold, the all but dowerless daughter of the all but ruined Earl of Kingshouse, was the mark at which old Miles aimed the shaft of his desire. If Caleb should accomplish that, his father would settle well-nigh all his fortune on the young people, and would withdraw with his wife for ever from the neighbourhood. He would content himself with the knowledge of the fact. He would not seek to share in its

glory, nor even to see the splendour of its rays. In the midst of the coarse materialism of his nature lay this one little flower of love, this purest pearl of unselfishness. If Caleb would make himself the man he should be, and go in and win as he ought, he, and not Miles, should then be the millionaire—he, and not Miles, should be the great man of the county and the commander of the future.

But Caleb would as soon have gone into a lion's den as into the Dower House, where the earl and countess and their family lived in secret penance and public pride. The castle was let to one Mr. Hermann Schmidt, a stock-broker who knew both how to spend his money like a prince and make a bargain like Shylock, and who was at once a generous friend of whom to ask a favour and a dangerous man with whom to do business. Old Miles never made the smallest doubt but that Lady Elizabeth would accept the golden bait as eagerly as a hungry trout would take a May-fly. It was money that ruled the world, so far as he could see; and, without being personally purse-

proud, he had an exaggerated sense of its value.

He was a man of a coarse, ripe, Rabelaisian kind of humour, to whom nothing in the world was sacred or forbidden. He had no more faith in humanity than the most gloomy pessimist who thinks he saves his own soul by calling those of others, well—*not* saved. To him life was a jolly kind of comedy, where the fools were tricked and lost what they had, and the wise men held their own and got more. He laughed and was not offended at this lapse and that stumble. It was human nature when all was said and done, he would say; and that the ‘furred puss-cats’ should scramble for the gold pieces—the stronger punching the heads of the weaker, and the weaker scratching slyly when they could not fight openly—that, too, he confessed and laughed at with the rest.

For himself he knew what he wanted; and he meant to have it if he could get it. As he walked about the house and grounds of Redhill, loud of voice, sturdy of limb, direct of intent, he was wont, as he expressed it, to make the

feathers fly. He was wont to make them fly so thick and fast that all avoided him when they could, in spite of the broad laugh that followed the verbal insult, and the 'Here, lad! here's a plaister for thy head,' which was to salve over a blow. One man alone stood up to him. This was an old gang-mate of his, one Jim Fisher, now made head-gardener, for all that he knew about as much of modern cultivation as he did of the differential calculus, and would have thought it flying in the face of Providence had he raised strawberries in May or cut grapes in April. And Jim Fisher—a sturdy, tough old tyke, who was more like a rough old sea-dog than a land snail—he withstood his old mate, now his master, boldly enough, and gave him back as good as he brought, and sometimes a trifle beyond. Consequently, he was almost the only person in existence for whom Miles Stagg had the faintest feeling of respect, or of whom he stood in so much wholesome awe as made him decently well-behaved when his humour pointed otherwise.

With his timid, silent, and of late years—

when she could no longer keep herself awake by active work—somnolent wife, old Miles was not so much roughly brutal as oppressive—coercing rather than tormenting, and not wishing in the least to torment. On the contrary, he meant to be kindly, and he was in truth as kindly as he knew how to be.

‘She has been a good wife to me,’ he used to say, when a little in his cups; ‘and what the—expletive—if I cannot make a lady of her I’ll not let her feel the differ.’

He had no idea that his close grip and strong will had suffocated her, and that not all his broad laughter nor coarse jokes could bring back to life the feeble spark of individuality he had crushed out of her. His ‘Give us a buss, old lass,’ after he had mentally trampled on her, was on a par with his sovereign given to the man he had cuffed till he had lamed. The torn flesh none the worse gaped; the broken bone was none the less apart; and the bruise ached all the same—that golden ointment notwithstanding. So with Nancy. Kisses, jokes, laughter—what you will—nothing restored

the broken will nor reanimated the destroyed spirit.

It was the same with his son whom he loved better than his life, but whom he now rated like a hound for his want of character and energy, and now cursed for a rebel if he dared to say his soul was his own and he thought he had the best right to it. He wanted to see the young fellow take part in the life of the place, and make his mark as a man of his means should. He would spare no expense if he could set him astride on the high-horse of public power and favour; and he could not be made to see that the very tyranny of his endeavour to fashion the man he would have him to be, frustrated his efforts, and that, by the means he took, he thwarted his own ends. How can you get a free-spirited, high-mettled youth out of a creature belaboured and bethrashed with words and whips as Caleb Stagg had ever been? From the day when he was a ten-months' old baby in his mother's arms and made a wry face at his daddy's beer, up to now, when he was a grown man of six-and-twenty, and would not put him-

self forward to win the matrimonial blue riband, his father made sure was within his reach, he had been hustled and hounded and rated and rasped—all for his own good, mind you!—and treated with no more human respect than if he had been a bit of wax, to be pinched and pulled and patted and posed as the modeller thought best.

Old Miles was vexed that he could not make the lad what he wanted him to be. He wished him to be a smart, gallant, adventurous kind of gentleman, who, by sheer pluck and audacity, would make good his entrance into society, and know how to keep what he had got till he wished to go higher. Then he might fling down the ladders by which he had mounted if he would. Miles Stagg was no sentimentalist; and though he stuck to his old mate, Jim Fisher, to the detriment of his houses, that was no reason why young Caleb should play the same soft game with society. He wished him to do well for himself, not for others; and, if chestnuts were to be pulled out of the fire, it was not the lad's fingers which were to get burned. Whose,

was not Miles Stagg's affair. He wished the boy to join the hunt and ride to hounds as a lad of spirit should. He should have the freshest bit of pink and the best horse to be seen at the cover-side, bar none, if he would. He wished him to learn how to dance and to go to all the subscription balls.

‘Lord, mother! but it would be rare sport to see our Caleb a-hopping about the floor like a parched pea on a drum-head!’ he would say to his wife Nancy, with a loud guffaw, after he had sworn at his son till you thought you saw blue fire. He wanted him to be hand-in-glove with this great name and that big swell; to put himself forward and make a dash—there was money enow. And when Caleb, ever mindful of the fact that he had worked with his father in the mines up to the age of seventeen, when the coal was found, kept to his books and his microscope upstairs, and slunk sheepishly about the lanes afoot like a tramp—grubbing in the hedges for bugs or fishing for slime in the ponds, instead of capering here and there like a lord, with a groom at his heels and the money jingling in his pockets

—old Miles used to have a turn at swearing and cursing that was like a fever-fit or a bout of whooping-cough, as irrepressible and severe. Then, as a solatium, he would buy the lad a diamond pin or a set of studs which Caleb would rather have been flayed alive than wear, and which he accepted with the painful smile that is on a man's face what tears are in a woman's eyes.

This kind of treatment had the sole effect of making young Caleb devote himself yet more sedulously to the life he had chosen and the pursuits which delighted him—keeping out of his boisterous parent's way as much as he could, and abjuring with the dogged passivity of his kind the line laid down for him with so many sharp nails and so many hard knocks. Brought up as a rough mining lad for all his early life, at eighteen he had gone to a local college, after a year's private training at a clergyman's. But the grit of the coal-dust, which he had breathed from his infancy, was never got out of him. Sensitive, observant, up to a certain point clever in his own way, and naturally shy and awk-

ward, he knew and felt all his own disabilities as his coarser-fibred father did not; and he kept within the obscurity which he felt was his best friend, following the studies which alone made him forget the sordid realities of things. His only happy hours were when he was watching the ways of bird or beast, spying out the secret arts of attack and defence of reptile and insect, or getting into the very workshop of Nature through the microscope. Add to this a close study of Shakespeare and the translated classics, and his list was complete. For of late years he had left off romping with the kitchen-maid in the hay-loft, as had been his wont when younger and less developed—the stablemen keeping watch lest old Miles should come along and blow the whole place about their ears. But, even now, a romp with the kitchen-maid would be preferable to making up to Lady Elizabeth Inchbold at the Dower House, for all that she had nothing of the aristocrat about her save her name, her traditions, her self-respect and her grace.

‘Thou’lt never do no good, Caleb,’ his father

one day said to him, with an angry shrug of his stalwart shoulders. 'What use have it been to waste all this brass on thy learning, when thou'rt nought but a dommed fool at the end of it? Thy mother's no lady, and thee's no gent; and, hang me, if the money had not better go to make a hospital for dead jackasses than to such lily-livered spenders as you two.'

Miles had often said the same thing before; but to-day he emphasized his disapprobation with stronger intonation; impelled thereto by his vexation that Caleb had refused to take up an invitation to a garden-party at the vicarage—Mr. and Mrs. Stewart, the vicar and vicaress, being of that good and wholesome sort which likes to draw all society into the one golden net of kindly feeling, and therefore including young Caleb Stagg in their invitations.

'You know, father, that I do not care for these parties,' said Caleb, awkwardly. 'They are not in my line, and I am never my own man in them.'

He spoke with a better accent than his father, and in a more finely modulated voice; but there

was always the unmistakable provincial accent ; and neither the clergyman nor the college had knocked the rustic out of him, to put in its place even the semblance of a gentleman.

‘And thee doesn’t make account of thy duty to me, as brought thee up,’ said Miles. ‘What thy father wishes doesn’t weigh so much as the tail-end of a mouse with thee. Thy father, who has slaved for thee, and thought night and day of nought but thee and what would be for thy good—thou’st nought better to do than flout and flear, when he wants thee to hold up thy head as thou should’st with the best.’

‘You know, father, I never meant to flout or flear you,’ said Caleb, earnestly ; ‘but I do not feel called on to go about among these people. They think themselves of another make of flesh and blood from us, and they don’t care a jot for our money—got, as it were, by a fluke, and with such owners as we.’

‘Such owners as we ! And what the dickens dost mean by that, jackanapes ?’ shouted Miles.

‘Why, just this, father—we are not gentlemen, and we can’t pretend that we are,’ said Caleb.

‘Toots—toots, lad! Brass’ll gild a miner’s pick till it is as fine as my lord’s sword,’ said Miles, half in fun and half in anger. ‘The gentry at Kingshouse ain’t far different from men and women elsewhere, I reckon; and a full purse goes as far, my lad, as those mouldy old coats-of-arms, with nothing behind them but lean chaps and family pride. Go thy ways, I tell thee. Hie upstairs, Caleb, like a good lad, and do as thy father bids. Don thy best coat, and go to the vicarage with the rest. And if thou’lt bring me home a well-doing, likely daughter-in-law, like that Lady Elizabeth yonder, I’d not care to call the king my uncle. And I’d set thee up in housekeeping so that the king shouldn’t be put about to call thee nephew.’

Caleb still hesitated—silent, awkward, reluctant, abashed; when his father suddenly flew into a rage such as even he was not accustomed to see; and with curses, kicks, blows and oaths offered him his choice—to go or to leave the house that very moment, disinherited for ever. His son had therefore nothing for it but to bend before the storm, and yield to his father’s desire;

and thus it was that for the first time in his life he formed one of the Kingshouse gatherings, and made his entrance into the fair company of whom Lady Elizabeth Inchbold was the social queen and Estelle Clanricarde the Star of Beauty.

CHAPTER III.

HIS IPHIGENIA.

ONE of old Miles Stagg's favourite aphorisms was that fine birds are made by fine feathers. Give Colin Clout a good coat, a flashy necktie, a gold chain as thick as a ship's rope, studs as big as sixpences, and all the rest to correspond, and Miles could see no difference between his appearance and that of the smartest young Jemmy Jessamy in the land. If Jemmy were to be dressed in flannels, the difference, indeed, would be to the good of Colin. Consequently, though Caleb, from his experience of college life, knew slightly better than his father, and from his more delicately-organized brain had at all times keener and quicker perceptions, he was forced to obey the old man's imperative command that he should

make himself as smart as ninepence, and take the shine out of that gang of genteel paupers he would meet in the vicarage gardens to-day.

His close-fitting frock-coat was new to rawness and distractingly faultless; his black trousers were still in the tailor's well-defined creases; his glossy hat shone like a blackened mirror; his jewellery was resplendent. Over the edge of his stiff white collar, guillotined with an aniline crimson tie fastened by a large diamond horseshoe pin, his round, flat, unmeaning face rose like a pug-dog's changed from black to red and white, and from caninity into a fairly good sketch of humanity. His fawn-coloured gloves matched the colour of his hair; and his patent leather boots crippled the flat feet which, for the most part, expatiated in greased boots where his corns were not tortured. Such as he was, holding himself as stiffly as if trussed beneath his clothes, shy, sheepish, uncomfortable, self-conscious, and not a whit reassured by his father's boisterous commendation nor by his mother's vacant smile, the young man mounted the dog-cart, which the coach-

man drove—the smart groom sitting behind, his arms folded and his tongue in his cheek—and went off to one of those informal tennis-parties which Mr. and Mrs. Stewart gave weekly for the pleasure of the young people and the promotion of social good feeling.

It need hardly be said what impression the poor young man made when he came on the lawn, somewhat after time because of the struggle at home, his wonderful get-up contrasting so sharply with the loose flannels of the rest—the tightly-buckled belts, the turned-up sleeves, the well-worn cricket shoes, and all the other loose points of the time and occasion. Not the dear good vicaress herself could resist that little smile which comes unbidden on the first flush of a ridiculous surprise, while some of the worse bred and less kindly tittered audibly. Lord Eustace, Lady Elizabeth's younger brother,—the elder, Lord Royme, was in India, which allowed the cadet to give himself the airs of the major,—gave a slight whistle, which was the rudest thing of all. But then he was a lord and entitled to his own private code. Charlie

Osborne, who, as poet, painter, musician, and artist generally, assumed to know more about the religion of beauty and the morality of æsthetics than anyone else, looked at the new-comer with the same expression on his face as he would have had if a false chord had been played, a halting rhyme repeated, or a man been detected hiding the ace up his sleeve.

As for Caleb himself, if that old familiar wish about the earth opening and swallowing him up alive could have been fulfilled for his benefit, how gladly would he have sunk beneath the sod, never to reappear! He was not sufficiently enlightened in the ethics of society to understand the full extent of his personal enormities, but he understood enough to make him miserable, and to make him wish that he had died before he had come. His distress was so apparent, his awkwardness so pitiful, his whole bearing so abject and humiliated that three charitable souls took him into the sacred precincts of their compassion, and forgot to ridicule for the sake of pity. One of these three was, of course, Mrs. Stewart herself—a woman of that liberal, kindly,

but not sentimental nature sometimes found in the arid wastes of society as might be found a fountain and a palm-tree in the desert; the other, Estelle, who thought how dreadful it must be to be like that! and the third was Lady Elizabeth Inchbold, the fair-set mark at which old Miles aimed the presumptuous shaft of his paternal desires.

But then this was Lady Elizabeth's way. Whatever there was of hurt and sorry, of low-lying, trampled on, helpless, mishandled, Lady Elizabeth was willing to lift up and comfort. Could she have wiped away all tears from all eyes at the cost of her own eternal weeping, she would have done so; could she have healed all wounds by the blood of her own heart, she would have healed them. No thought of self, no calculation of the extent or cost of her sacrifice, troubled the pure stream of her humanity. That she should besmirch herself by touching the besmirched never occurred to her as possible. And if it had? Well! those who give themselves up to the care of the lepers doom themselves to the disease they live to

soothe and die in assuaging. Had the loss of her own soul redeemed the souls of the world, she would have carried it as her offering before the judgment-seat, to save the humanity she loved so well—and pitied as much as she loved.

Estelle Clanricarde's great friend, she and Charlie Osborne, whom Estelle loved, stood at the opposite sides of that great triangle of life and thought, the apex of which is truth. Where he, bitten by the sentimental cynicism of a certain school, despised his kind and held life but a blotch and a blunder—more especially modern life and all the changes wrought by steam and science—she saw good everywhere; and, like those who bore for underground waters on a sandy track, knew how to find the deeper beauties hidden beneath superficial ugliness. For her, unselfish, generous, glad to serve and eager to save, were more harmonies than discords in this great diapason of suffering and joy, of vice and virtue; for him, self-indulgent to pleasure and weak to pain, unable to bear, of irritable fibre all through, were mainly discords,

with here and there a harmony in a gorgeous sunset or finely-worded objurgation by the high-priest of his own restricted sect, or in Estelle Clanricarde, when he could get her to himself and forget his artificial pessimism in the light of her dear eyes. Lady Elizabeth did not lose touch of the real in the ideal. She therefore loved mankind, and pitied as much as she loved. Charlie Osborne refused sympathy, because of his abhorrence for that which was mean and low and ugly in man. Her love went to people, his to things; hers to facts, his to thoughts. Between them lay the whole difference between the two great schools of humanism and idealism—humanity and art.

It was not then out of the usual ordering of things, but the reverse, that when her grave, calm eyes had taken the whole circumstances of this unhappy omadhaun, so painfully out of place, Lady Elizabeth should go to where Mrs. Stewart was still talking to him in her brisk, bee-like manner, and join in the conversation as one who had the right of previous knowledge. She had that way. Her manner was that of

one who had already established a claim of sympathy, and counted the points of contact. She never stood on the defensive, as even well-bred people are wont to do with strangers, but assumed from the first that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.

‘By Jove! that sister of mine is stark, staring mad. Look at her talking to that Polichinelle,’ said Lord Eustace, not below his breath, to Estelle, to whom he was paying exaggerated court, to take a rise out of Charlie Osborne—for mischief, not malice.

‘On the contrary, I think she is very sweet to be so kind to such an object. But then she always is so kind!’ returned Estelle, glad to be able to contradict her adhesive companion, whom she could not shake off and wished anywhere but where he was.

She knew Charlie’s sensitive jealousy and faculty for self-tormenting; and she had no wish to vex him for Lord Eustace’s pleasure. She was far too gentle and sweet-nurtured to wish to vex him for her own—just to see the power she had over him—as is the way with certain of her sex.

‘Are you, too, one of the new sort?’ asked Lord Eustace, contemptuously. ‘I thank my good stars I am out of it. All this playing at democracy seems to me not only the worst form but the vilest rot afloat. It is rank atheism to pretend that we have no distinction of classes, and that gentlemen and boors are own brothers. And only cads are atheists.’

‘All the same, I think Lady Elizabeth is very sweet to go and talk to that dreadful creature,’ said Estelle, with her pretty doggedness.

And then—her mother’s back being conveniently turned at the moment—she looked round to Charlie Osborne, and sent him a telegraphic message with her eyes which allayed some of the fever burning in his veins. After all, Lord Eustace had but the appearance, the simulacrum of things, and he himself held the reality. But to the sensuous artistic temperament, ‘founded on ultimates,’ as this generally is—unlike the dreamy poetic—mental knowledge does not satisfy like personal holding; and Lord Eustace was none the less detestable in his usurpation because Estelle was adorable in her faithfulness.

Meanwhile, Lady Elizabeth took it in hand to make poor Caleb's present torture a little less unendurable. She found him hard work. There was not a solecism that he did not commit, not a gaucherie that he left untouched. He called her 'Miss,' to start with, and when Mrs. Stewart gave her her title formally, he made 'Lady Elizabeth' flank every sentence, now before, now behind, and sometimes fore and aft together.

When Mrs. Stewart said :

'I don't think you know many people here, Mr. Stagg?' poor Caleb blushed like a peony and looked like a fool.

'No, Mrs. Stewart, not to speak to,' he answered.

Then, when she presented him to Lady Elizabeth, he forgot his hat and shook hands instead. When, pointing to the garden-seat near to where they were standing, Lady Elizabeth said : 'Shall we sit down?' he planted himself at once on the edge in the shade, and let her sit in the sun with the light in her eyes. When he saw his mistake he was too awkward to get up and rectify it, though he would have

let her walk over his body and use his fine new clothes for a door-mat had she had the mind. And when she, with that wonderful insight which belonged to her, divining the cause of his apparent discourtesy and knowing that the little sacrifice would be his pleasure, said, quietly: 'I am sure your eyes are stronger than mine, Mr. Stagg; would you mind changing places with me?' he very nearly tumbled headforemost into her lap in his eagerness to obey her, and, for her benefit, wiped with his handkerchief the place where he had been sitting.

But by slow degrees he ceased to twirl his hat between his knees; his heart left off beating in those painful gasps which are more like sobs than beats; those invisible needles ceased to prick him as they had been pricking him ever since he drove up to the gates; he got to feel that he knew this Lady Elizabeth, this daughter of the earl, quite well, though not intimately—as one would know one's guardian-angel say, something to revere but not to be afraid of; while over all his being stole a divine sense of

calm as with a lost wanderer when he sees the welcome light of a human home.

After probing and ploughing this barren tract and that arid acre, Lady Elizabeth at last fell on Caleb's own particular subject—flowers and birds and natural history generally. It needed patience and good engineering to draw from the poor omadhaun the fact that he knew anything at all; but the 'Delight'—as her father sometimes called her—who had him in hand, was both patient and a good conversational engineer; and though her shy and awkward naturalist never ventured on a positive assertion, but said what he had to say with a modest 'I think,' as the grating behind which his knowledge took refuge—even to 'thinking' that field-mice eat honey bees, and that the sun-dew entraps flies—she got a great deal out of him that was pleasant and new, and that made her uphill grind a little less arduous.

Also, it somewhat tightened the slack cords of his own self-esteem to find that he could interest her by what he said. How glad he was that she cared for nature and things! He was

indemnified now for all the ridicule and coarse opposition his student's tastes had had to face and bear at home. This divine creature, who reminded him of some Greek goddess, met him on his own ground and asked him for information. It was an honour which seemed to crown his head with a fillet of gold when she said that she would like him to show her in his microscope things she had not yet seen, and teach her more than she already knew. It was the noble touch of womanly dependence which rouses in a man's soul all that he has of heroism and devotion. Younger than himself, but how immeasurably superior, this beautiful girl-woman seemed to draw his whole being into hers, as the lake receives the rill, as the formless mist over the morass is absorbed into the infinite heaven. Had he been a Greek, she would have represented to him the chaste splendour of that goddess who kissed the sleeping boy on Mount Latmos; had he been a Roman, she would have been the renewal of Numa's sacred counsellor; as a Roman Catholic he would have seen in her the holy likeness of the Blessed Virgin; as a

Hindù, she would have been Lachshmi, the female energy of Vishnù. She was, in any case, semi-divine, and he was glad now that he had braved the torment of this ordeal, seeing what great gift of grace and joy it had brought him. His pug-dog face beamed like one who has met an angel by the way; and something deeper than its ordinary flat and level sentiments seemed to have come into it. But this delightful state of things could not last very long. Lady Elizabeth was too valuable a member of the small society on the lawn to be allowed to give herself to one only—especially such a one as Caleb Stagg.

Estelle was the one who came to disturb an interview which was beginning to really interest Lady Elizabeth, and to set the butterfly stirring within the chrysalis with Caleb. She was bored by Lord Eustace, and, under the strict patrol of her mother's watchful eyes, she could not get so much as a whispered word with Charlie—scarcely a fleeting look. He at last, in a fit of jealous rage and despair, had gone to the hammock that swung untenanted

between the two evergreen oaks. Estelle thought that, if she were sheltered and shielded by Lady Elizabeth, she might perhaps snatch a perilous five minutes of joy, soothe her lover's perturbed spirit, and drink another draught of that sweet poison without which young life is but a desert and young hearts as dry as potsherds. Accordingly, she came strolling up to where this strangely-mated pair were sitting on the garden-seat backed by azaleas and rhododendrons, and in a pretty, beseeching way asked her friend to come with her for a little walk—and that walk would be to the two evergreen oaks between which the hammock was swinging, with Charlie Osborne eating out his heart. The winding of the paths and the friendly intervention of flowering shrubs would hide them from Mrs. Clanricarde; and all would be well and without danger.

As Lady Elizabeth had it also at heart as a duty to help poor Estelle when she could, and as she did not think that a new interest should upset an old one, she said: 'Yes, I will go with you, dear—' as Estelle knew she would.

Then, turning to Caleb, she asked :

‘ Shall I introduce you to anyone before I go ?’

‘ Thank you, Lady Elizabeth, I don’t think I care to know anyone else, thank you, Lady Elizabeth,’ said Caleb, with a blush that made his ears as red as fleshy flames.

‘ But you will be dull, knowing no one,’ said the daughter of the Earl of Kingshouse, with as much kindly consideration and courtesy as if her brother’s Polichinelle had been the son of a king.

‘ I think not, Lady Elizabeth,’ was his stammered reply.

She could not say : ‘ Will you come with us ?’ That would not have been fair to Estelle ; but she wished she could have carried him with her, as she would have rescued some bird from boys, some monkey from a brutal showman.

‘ I’ll just keep to myself now that you are going, Lady Elizabeth,’ said Caleb after a pause, between the Scylla of not liking to make an independent observation and the Charybdis of not wishing this beautiful woman to trouble herself on his account.

‘I am sorry to take Lady Elizabeth away,’ said Estelle very kindly.

Had it been anyone but Charlie Osborne she would have kept the poor fellow in his present safety, and have thrown over all the rest.

‘Oh! don’t vex yourself, miss,’ Caleb answered with another torrent of blushes. ‘I couldn’t expect that ladies like Lady Elizabeth and yourself, miss, would stay with such as me,’ he added, with the deep humility of his kind.

‘I am so sorry; but, oh! come, dear!’ whispered Estelle, the selfishness of love sweeping away her philanthropy; and Lady Elizabeth turned away with a smile to poor Caleb that left on his bewildered soul the impression of moonlight on the water, of soft moss, of cool green forest glades, of a rare wild-flower found on the edge of a sheltered pool, of all that there is of soothing and entrancing in nature. And, while the two friends strolled away to carry comfort and bring joy to poor irritated Charlie Osborne, Caleb slunk into the shrubbery that sloped sharply downwards to the river.

If he could have left the vicarage at this

moment he would ; but he was bound. He had not arrived punctually, and that had been a grievous thing to him. The card of invitation had said 'four to seven,' and he had not been there till half-past four. He had ordered the trap to return punctually on the stroke of seven, and it never occurred to him that he could leave before it came. He had then two long mortal hours to fill up, and how was he to fill them? The best thing he knew was to keep out of sight of everyone ; so he slunk into the shrubbery, and for the first time in these late enthusiastic years of study he forgot to look for creatures.

All nature seemed transformed, and he knew nothing of what he saw, or, rather, he saw nothing as it was about him. He felt as if in some strange place full of mild glory and an all-pervading but indefinite light. Was this the unconscious effect of the laburnums under which he was walking, knowing nothing of the fountains of gold falling all around and above him? He was companioned by beings of whose presence he was conscious but whose forms he could not see. Voices spoke to his inner heart sweeter

than the songs of thrush and linnet, as suggestive and as wordless ; and the earth beneath his feet was no more solid than so much iridescent cloud. A strange sense of inward prayer possessed him, and he seemed to have come into another phase and region of life altogether—he seemed to have come to some new but uncatalogued knowledge. He sat down on the mossy bank, far from the path, and looked fixedly before him—not to observe, not to think, but to be wafted unresistingly on this divine air, to float unsteered down this exquisite stream. Tears, of which he was not conscious, slowly gathered in his wide-opened eyes and fell on his red silk tie. He was trembling with that kind of rapturous tremor which overpowers us in the presence of some sublime beauty of nature. The poor omadhaun ! the poor Polichinelle ! Who would have credited him with those birth-pangs of a new soul—he, in his glossy hat and tailor's triumphs of coat and trousers, his fawn-coloured gloves, and flashing horse-shoe diamond pin ! The satyr which enclosed the god, the temple, the gift of man to maid,

of mother to child, was the archetype of poor Caleb's soul, imprisoned in such a body and overlaid by such conditions as nature and fortune had made for him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOLD THAT GLITTERS.

THE matrimonial market at Kingshouse was really too heartbreaking! So Mrs. Clanricarde thought, in the incessant way of one who has a perennial grievance, though she had enough self-control not to think aloud. Here in Estelle was the winning number, and no prize to take! It was as though a thoroughbred, trained for the Oaks, had only costermongers' donkeys to contend against, and a bunch of turnip-tops when the post was passed. It was indeed heartbreaking—with those family funds always decreasing, and good guineas going after bad like so many 'moutons de Panurge.' Lord Eustace was as purely a detrimental as Charlie Osborne himself, and from the same cause. He

wanted money with his wife to float him off the financial shallows where at present he and all his house were stranded. He could not afford to marry for mere love and beauty ; no man can now-a-days who has not a good fortune firmly secured. Certainly no one in Kingshouse could ; unless he were prepared to bring up a family on stirabout and to dress them in blue house-flannel and workhouse sheeting.

Caleb Stagg was the only monied man available ; and even Mrs. Clanricarde shrank from a creature who wore tailor's triumphs at an informal tennis-party, and flaunted a flaring red tie with a flashing diamond pin. Still, he was rich beyond those dreams of avarice we all have heard of ; and on the principle of the living dog and the dead lion, a golden calf is better than a leaden phoenix, and those who want butter to their bread must not be very nice as to the shape of the knife wherewith it is spread. Besides, no plastic substance is utterly hopeless to reform ; and, if Caleb Stagg had a mind at all, and his proper complement of limbs and senses, surely an astute mother-in-law could pull him

into shape! Even all princes are not personable men; and other poets than Pope have been outside the pale of manly beauty.

Stirred then by all these reasons, more or less deliberately recognized, Mrs. Clanricarde went to Mrs. Stewart, and in her pretty French way, which beat all the English manner out of the field, asked what had become of Mr. Stagg? Poor young man!—it must be very triste for him, here among so many strangers! and should they find him and console him?

‘He is somewhere about,’ said Mrs. Stewart, looking vaguely round. Truth to say, she had forgotten him. Like many kind-hearted, brisk, and energetic women, she was apt to be sporadic in her interests and a little unordered in her ways.

‘Let us go and find him,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, looking behind a rose-bush as if he might be hiding in its shadow.

But they sought in vain. Deep down in the shrubbery, off the path and on the border of the river, the poor omadhaun sat cradling his newborn soul, and the things of time and space were

to him as nought. Mrs. Stewart went the length of even a shrill little call, to which was no response ; and the search was perforce abandoned. Meanwhile, Estelle and Charlie Osborne made the most of their chance, and Mrs. Clanricarde lost on all sides at once.

The hours of pleasure passed and that of departure came on. That automatic memory of time, which seems to belong to the body rather than the mind, made Caleb know that he must rouse himself from his mental ecstasy and physical stupor, and go through the ordeal of saying good-day to Mr. and Mrs. Stewart. He came to himself and unlocked his eyes from their gaze on vacancy ; his face relaxed from its fixed immobility, and with the release of the muscles he found it wet ; and yet it had not been raining—his clothes were dry. He took his bright blue silk handkerchief from his pocket and wiped it vigorously—wiped it so that it glowed and shone, while the two thick ears stood out again like flames within a transparent cover, set against his sandy hair. He stared about him as a man does when suddenly

awakened ; and for a moment was dazed as to his whereabouts and how he got there. Then he pulled himself together, as the phrase is, and went up the steep path—his ordinarily slouching stride a little clipped because of his aching feet imprisoned in their tight new boots. As he came on to the lawn the whole party was assembled together. No one had yet gone. It seemed to Caleb as if all England was there. His round eyes took in no one precisely, no one personally. He only saw a sea of bonnets and cricket caps, of coloured frocks and white flannels, of women's faces and men's moustaches. Then he caught sight of two large lustrous grey eyes, and all the rest vanished like a phantasmagoria. Only those glorious eyes remained, as his home, his lode-star, his anchorage, in this bewildering sea of unfamiliar humanity.

Nothing of all this was shown. The face of a man is not as a sheet of glass through which can be read his thoughts and feelings. All that the assembled company saw was a round, flat, red-faced young man in an absurd get-up,

staring at Lady Elizabeth Inchbold with all his might, and standing stock-still, as if struck to stone.

Lady Elizabeth herself broke the spell by saying, with marked kindness, to this mute stargazer whom she knew the rest were mutely ridiculing:

‘Have you seen that beautiful avenue of laburnums, Mr. Stagg? You were in the shrubbery, I think? Did you see them?’

Caleb blushed, as he naturally would when thus brought back to the things of the actual present.

‘No, Lady Elizabeth,’ he said.

Poor fellow! As little as Jim Bludso did he know how to lie. Even those white lies of society, which save appearance and mask confession, were as far from his understanding as were the recognized shibboleths and authorized formulas.

‘It was a pity to have missed them,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, adopting Lady Elizabeth’s tone, and looking with artificial benignity on the omadhaun, so thickly plated with gold

as to be an almost possible associate—perhaps even something more :—who knows?

Caleb turned his round face and rounder eyes on the speaker with pitiable bewilderment. It was all like some distressful dream. Why should these people stand there looking at him? Their eyes, multiplied to hundreds, stuck like lances into his heart. He felt as if he had unwittingly committed some offence, and this was his arraignment. It was a nightmare; but he retained just so much of consciousness as to let him understand that Mrs. Clanricarde had spoken; and, not knowing too clearly what she had said nor what he ought to reply, his native courtesy came to his aid, and he answered simply: ‘Thank you, Mrs. Clanricarde,’ as the only thing that presented itself.

Though he had not been formally introduced to anyone but Lady Elizabeth Inchbold, he knew quite well each individual of the assembly, when he could detach his wits from their wool-gathering and force them into concrete observation. The Sunday club of church is the great photograph of a neighbourhood, where people

learn to know one another without speech or contact.

‘Let me take you,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, still benign and humane.

‘I’m loth to trouble you, Mrs. Clanricarde,’ answered Caleb.

‘It would be a pleasure,’ said Estelle’s mother, with her airy French politeness; and Caleb, feeling as one in a mill-race dragged into the deep waters by a force he could not resist, was led like a calf by a wisp of straw to where the laburnums hung like golden fountains against the sky.

As she went, Mrs. Clanricarde commanded Estelle to accompany her by the look her daughter knew so well. Even she, bold player as well as astute calculator as she was, could scarcely show her hand so plainly as to say: ‘Come with me,’ before the world. As things were, her action might pass for that kind of maternal kindness which sits not ungracefully on a woman of forty when dealing with young men under thirty, Eudemons or omadhauns. Had she commanded Estelle openly, the colour

of the whole thing would have been different. But Estelle herself might come of her own proper motion. That would be a pretty reduplication of an amiable condescension and would give no one cause to sneer.

But Estelle remained impassive, and Charlie Osborne got the good of her contumacy.

Through all the time of their walk, which Mrs. Clanricarde did not hurry, the weight of conversation rested on her alone; she got answers of a kind from Caleb—but they were emphatically of a kind. At the end she was no nearer anything like acquaintance or sympathy than she had been at the beginning. She had not that subtle art, that magic of sympathy, which made Lady Elizabeth able to strike the rock and let the imprisoned flood roll forth. Her action had in it no real kindness. It was essentially egotistic and well calculated; and the poor omadhaun felt the difference he could not have defined. But he was grateful all the same; and he looked at the laburnums with proper admiration, and was glad that he had seen them. How he had gone into the shrub-

bery at all, if not by this path, was a problem to Mrs. Clanricarde. It was the entrance whence branched out other winding ways; but Caleb could not answer her when she put him to the question, save by saying, in his confused, distracted, muddled way :

‘I was in the shrubbery, Mrs. Clanricarde, but I don’t know how I got there.’

That self-praise which parents are not averse from heaping on themselves when they go out of their way to help their children, was rather largely drawn on by Mrs. Clanricarde during this walk with such a dummy as Caleb Stagg. Over and over again she said to herself how grateful Estelle ought to be to her for her self-sacrifice; and what a good mother she was; and how little children knew of all the trouble and pain and annoyance they cause their parents; and what a thankless task it was when all is said and done. Her self-praise went far to soothe her rasped nerves; for we must confess that, to a brisk-witted, French-blooded woman, monosyllabic answers, with the invariable guard of the name and the blankest look of ignorance

as to the essential meaning of the remark, are not inspiriting, and may excuse some inward objurgations. But she went through her self-appointed task with gallant consistency, and got so far on the way she wanted to go as to fix a day for Caleb to call at 'Les Saules'—which local orthography spelt, and local intonation pronounced, 'Lissols.' As he had at last entered society through the vicarage gate, there was no impropriety in opening her own. And she could try her hand at his re-formation. If he proved hopeless she had but to abandon him; if he were practicable—Estelle had before now taken a silver-coated pill. This of gold would also have to be taken.

When they returned to the lawn the great bulk of the company had gone. Lady Elizabeth was no longer there, and Estelle and Charlie Osborne had also disappeared. They had walked to the gate, where the carriage would overtake them—Estelle, resigned to brave the maternal tempest that she knew would follow on her act of disobedience and temerity, if only she could comfort and make happy her handsome lover meanwhile.

Then Caleb, shaking hands with Mr. and Mrs. Stewart and with Mrs. Clanricarde, so heartily that the ladies nearly shrieked as their fingers were cut by their rings, said, in his strange old-world way, vivified from mummydom only by excessive embarrassment: 'And thank you, Mrs. Stewart, for my entertainment'—and the same to Mrs. Clanricarde, varying only the name. But his heart was heavy, and the world seemed empty, and he felt that he had been worse than a boor and less polite than a coalheaver in that he had not been able to say the same to Lady Elizabeth, to whom he owed so much more than to anyone else.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOUSE AND THE LION.

THE big estates of landed proprietors, where neither coal nor iron has been found, where no new towns have sprung up, and the semi-detached villas dear to the jerry-builder are as yet unknown, do not represent their former income nor consideration. Farms are no longer fortunes, and fields do little more than pay for themselves; but families increase, debts bear interest, the younger children's portions have to be paid, and mortgages and rent-charges eat up more than half the revenue coming from landed property. Gold, too, is cheaper than it was, and the buying value of a sovereign lessens yearly. So that all conspires together against the monied position of the ancient landowner,

while commerce, trade and speculation fill the purses of new men almost to bursting.

The Earl of Kingshouse was an example of the ruthlessness of the times. There was no possible blame to be found with him and his. They had lived the ordinary lives of ordinary gallant gentlemen, enjoying the sunshine while it lasted, and believing in its everlasting continuance by direct providential ordering for their benefit. They had not been spendthrifts of an extravagant kind, and they had not been monstrously vicious. Neither had they come to the front as great generals nor as noted statesmen, though they had been for generations officers in the Army and Navy; nor had they ended as Government officials of high rank after beginning as attachés of very problematic value. Still, the family wealth had slowly decreased both in actual bulk and relative proportions, till, as has been said, the present earl had been forced to let the castle for what rental it would fetch, and live in the Dower House with as much economy as he could command and more modesty than he enjoyed.

It was, however, his only hope; but even with this things did not mend, and the red lion couchant, which was their proud family crest, was daily more sharply pinched within that galling net of debt and difficulty drawing ever tighter and tighter round it. What was to be done? How from that proverbial stone get the desired blood? All the wood that was available had been already cut down, and many an out-lying corner had been docked off the estate. There were more that might follow, Lord Royme consenting; and there was one bit that must follow.

It went sorely against the grain, and the pride of the aristocrat resented the necessity. But it was a necessity; and when this is to the fore, where, I pray you, is the counteracting law—the controlling force? The Kingshouse estate must be still further clipped; and if the foul fiend himself held the shears he must be dealt with as a gentleman and courteously entreated. The estate went up as far as the garden-wall of Redhill; and that bit was just what would suit the ex-miner to buy. It was

grief and pain to traffic the land, which represented his dignity, for the gold of a man whom, in former days, my lord would not have taken into his service as a groom, nor admitted his son into his house as a shoeblack. But those debts were pressing ; money was absolutely necessary, yet as difficult to find as if buried in a pot beneath the rainbow ; the Jews were sharks of a more formidable kind than Miles Stagg would be ; and that bit of poor land would fetch a good price if the hirsute millionaire, on whose garden-wall it abutted, should desire to have it, and so throw out another runner into the rich soil of landed proprietorship. It was like a braid of living snakes. Each strand was intertwined with the others, and the whole had to be accepted—heads and tails and stings included.

My lord was no Christian Democrat after the pattern of his daughter. On the contrary, he looked on states and principalities as of divine ordination, and held the tamperers therewith as rebels against the express decree of the Almighty—rebels with whom the policeman's

truncheon was the only valid argument and a felon's prison-cell the righteous remedy. In this sweeping condemnation, however, he did not include that daughter—his Delight, as it has been said he used to call her. Like many other loving, and therefore illogical, people, love made a private line of its own and allowed a new principle to appear when it touched himself. Had it been Molly, the dairymaid, for instance, or Mrs. Clanricarde, or even Mrs. Stewart—though, as the wife of a clergyman, she was officially free of certain philanthropic fads caviare to the million—who had maintained the essential superiority of the human being over the conventional claims of aristocratic gentleness—he would have consigned any one of them to the eternal perdition for which she had qualified herself. But Lady Elizabeth was different. The inexhaustible fountain of mercy would grant forgiveness for a mistake which, in the boundless expanse of divine knowledge, would figure as a virtue—a little awry, and with a kink somewhere in the golden thread; but always a virtue, and to be rewarded as one.

Lord Eustace had told his father of Lady Elizabeth's damaging condescension at the tennis-party; and he had himself, with his own aristocratic and august eyes, seen her shake hands with the omadhaun at the church-door on the Sunday following. He had seen and wondered, but he had not interfered—partly because of that bit of land which had been weighing on his mind for some time past—partly because he thought that if it was her good pleasure to find any merit in that extraordinary-looking young man called Caleb Stagg—to my lord his very name was enough—if, in the plenitude of her seraphic sweetness, she thought her grace and condescension would in any way, or to the smallest degree, redeem him from the gross burden of his inheritance—well, that was just her goodness warping her intellect. The earl, her father, did not share her belief and had no part in her choice. Sly is always Sly, and the sty does not breed lions. Nor is it politically desirable to aim at such social or personal transmutation. Morally and religiously, of course, it was all right; but then

he was not so moral, nor so religious either, in a transcendental way, as she. Men never are so good as women; and she was better than most women, if he was no worse than the average man. All this gentle playing at providence and philanthropy pleased her, his Delight, who took the shine out of them all; and, if no one profited, it did no one any harm. Wherefore he merely raised his eyebrows when he saw his daughter's act of condescension before the whole congregation, and said not a word to bring a shade of sorrow on that pure, sweet, holy face, which was to him the dearest thing in life.

Besides, again, my lord had the true English gentleman's feeling with respect to the action of his own women. He gave them their head up to a certain point; on the one hand, because they were of his own order, whose status touched his, and who were therefore entitled to respect as their birthright; on the other, for contempt as to what they might do. The two motives had their common source in pride; which is not wholly bad. When tenderness is superadded, as with my lord for his daughter,

the thing takes another complexion, and what was the lofty toleration of contempt becomes the free gift of love, recognizing equal moral rights.

All the same, the ex-miner and his family were of a different flesh and blood from the flesh and blood of those born in the purple, in my lord's estimate of human value; and his dear Delight's undoubted virtue had as undoubtedly a queer twist in it somewhere.

It was a proud day for Miles Stagg when my lord's agent wrote to him, offering him that parcel of land known as the Redhill Braes for such and such a sum, which, truth to say, was about three times its market value. One-third had been added because of that abutment of the garden-wall; the other because it was the Earl of Kingshouse who opened negotiations at second-hand with Miles Stagg, the ex-miner; the third was the solid base-line of which these other two made the sides of the triangle.

Without a trace of snobbishness in his rough-hewn character, Miles could not be indifferent to such topsy-turveydom of condition as was

implied in this offer. It was simply human nature that he should be proud of the consciousness that he, only a few years ago a mere day-labourer, earning his twenty to thirty shillings a-week, should now be able to help my lord, who was like a little God Almighty among them all.

‘Proud! ay, that was he surely,’ as he said to Nancy, who was partly dazed and partly frightened by the event.

And yet he felt sorry—almost ashamed—that the great and powerful should be so humbled and brought so far low. He would rather have negotiated for Lady Elizabeth’s hand on the more equal terms of money for rank, and as good a lad as ever stepped for a likely lady’s husband and the father of her ladyship’s bairns. That would have been a fair exchange and no robbery, he said; but this offer of a parcel of poor land for three times its market value was such a confession of need! It made him downright sorry for the grand old family; and he was no wise minded to sniff at the evident extortion, nor would he haggle over the price. He would

pay my lord what he asked ; and much good might the brass do him—not said ironically, but in serious earnest.

For Miles had none of that sour enviousness which rejoices in the discomfiture of others, after having bitten its nails in futile hatred of their success ; none of that travestied democratic feeling which likes to see the downfall of former greatness, and would, if it could, reduce all things to one dead level of worse than mediocrity. Neither was he afflicted with that baser kind of the social trading spirit which takes advantage of need. It never occurred to him to make this business transaction a basis for further operations, and to add, as a stipulation on the back of his cheques, the social recognition of the man he was serving. He was too honest for that, and too proud in his own way. He left that kind of thing to the society worms who wriggle up the ladder of drawing-rooms by all the means they can command, and are not particular as to what those means may be.

He, Miles, wanted nought with society for

himself, though he was main glad that Caleb should have his whack. He wanted, truly, to see his lad wedded to a lass with a grand name, so that he should thus be able to found a family, as such wealth as theirs should do. He wanted Lady Elizabeth as his daughter-in-law; but he was not going to put this on the back of the cheque. Things must come as they would, and Caleb must strike his own seam in his own way, knowing as how his daddy was at his back to second his darrack. At all events, he was not going to trouble my lord now that he was a bit in his power, and he would leave that question of the marriage settlements till the young folk were better acquainted.

Hence, the bargain was concluded between the horny-handed Croesus and the empty-handed aristocrat on the strictest business footing; and my lord never knew how much he owed to the generosity of the man he generally designated as 'that brute' when he spoke of him at all. It was the old fable of the mouse and the lion, when the insignificant little animal gnaws the cords by which the king of beasts is bound, and

sets him once more free to pace the desert and devour the weaker creatures. My lord paid part of his more pressing debts with the ex-miner's money; and the ex-miner wondered what on earth he was to do with the land now that he had it, and what good would be the Braes to him when they were of none to his lordship?

‘They’ll do to remind thee, Miles, that a fool and his money’s soon parted,’ said Jim Fisher, stroking his long chin.

And Miles answered, with a voice like a fog-horn :

‘Ay, man, that will they!’ laughing as if the loss of so many thousands stood as a huge financial joke.

‘The worst bit of land round all the countryside,’ continued Jim, always in his quality of Janus—Mentor on the one side and Thersites on the other.

‘That’s about it, Jim,’ returned his former gang-mate and present patron.

‘Them thistles and ragwort fairly bet my garden,’ continued Jim. ‘It takes a man’s time to keep down t’ weeds as flies over the wall.’

‘We’ll stub ’em up, Jim,’ said Miles, roughly cheery. ‘Thou’st got to be glad, man, as I’ve bought the land. Thy garden’ll be all the cleaner now that I’ve my right to the ploughing on’t.’

‘Ploughing!’ repeated Jim disdainfully; ‘as if ary a plough as was ever forged would go in among them stones! I think thou’st losing thy eyesight, Miles. Why, t’ land is fell-land, top and bottom; and, unless ye can stuff pillows with thistle-seed, I don’t see what ye’ll make of it, nor where the vally of it lies, no-how.’

‘We’ll see!’ said Miles, laughing amain and slapping his pockets as he was wont when pleased. ‘If I don’t find a vally for the land, tell me my name’s not Miles Stagg, and call me Jack Robinson instead.’

‘Jack-pudding, Jack-fool, Jack-ass! That’s what I’ll call thee,’ grumbled Jim, walking back to his turnips as stiff as a soldier on parade and as sour as an unripe lemon.

But if the purchase of this parcel of land—this part of the great earl’s estate, with its rich crop of ragwort and thistles—did not add much

to Miles Stagg's essential position as a landed proprietor, still less advance by even a hair's-breadth that darling dream of aristocratic alliance which he caressed, as Bottom might have caressed Titania—it touched Caleb's position in the society of the place, and materially improved his questionable holding. It was one thing for this rough and hirsute Sly, this examiner Stagg, to have bought Redhill; to have built a hideous new house on the site of the old dark, tumble-down, inconvenient Elizabethan gem; to have set up 'glass' by the acre, and to let surly old Jim Fisher neglect all their potentialities when he had done so—and another thing to buy the Braes direct from my lord himself.

The former owner of Redhill had been an absentee—holding a coffee-plantation in Jamaica which he could neither leave nor sell, though it did not pay its working expenses—and the house had been let to anyone who would take it: now, to a shady captain, who, as they said in those parts, 'shot the moon' one night when the place had become too hot for him; and now to a

farmer who had turned the banqueting-hall into a granary. Thus the neighbourhood had felt no twinge of resentful sympathy for dispossession of an honoured holder when Miles Stagg bought the place, nor disapprobation of the new man's land-grabbing. Nor had it felt personally or, locally enriched by the miner's gold, which had flowed over the seas and had done no good to anyone at home. When it came to the opening of a direct conduit—when my lord lowered his crest so far as to condescend to sell part of the great Kingshouse estate to the former miner, and had got three times its market value for the parcel—then the neighbourhood pricked up its ears and rubbed its dry hands together, and wondered if perchance any drops of this beautiful golden ointment would ever moisten this and that and the other of those curved and hungry palms?

And thinking this, and feeling that this transaction brought these awful Staggs within the possibilities of human recognition and direct contact, it bestowed some amount of social consideration on Caleb; and doors opened wider

than they would have done had not the Braes been covered with that fertile coal-dust which Fortune's alchemy had turned to gold.

CHAPTER VI.

STAR OR MOONLIGHT.

THE Earl of Kingshouse was devoted to astronomy; his wife to embroidery. Between these two absorptions lay a wide tract of domestic freedom by which Lady Elizabeth profited—no one interfering. Her father, whose favourite pursuit caused him to turn night into day, was asleep when he should have been awake. Her mother, who had grown indolent in her comparative poverty and seclusion, asked only to be let alone, wrestling with the difficulty of shades and stitches, and mourning in completion the annihilation of endeavour. Hence, Lady Elizabeth lived her own life emphatically, and carried out to the utmost of which she was capable the philanthropic doc-

trines which, in 'Parson Lot's' time, would have gone under the name of Christian Socialism. She had her own little suite of rooms in the Dower House, as she had had in the castle. Bed-room, dressing-room and boudoir, all gave off the first landing; and her isolation was as complete as her liberty. She received whom she would and did as she would; and the only one who ever dreamed of objecting was her brother Eustace—and he found no audience. His father pooh-poohed him in favour of his Delight, and his mother followed suit in favour of her indolence. If Elizabeth really went too far, and did what she ought not—that, proved, would necessitate her own stricter surveillance and more active companionship; and for this the effort would be too great. Of the two, she preferred to be an ostrich rather than a fly, and to stick her head into the sand, seeing nothing, rather than to light on a window-pane, looking all ways at once.

'Eustace was so fidgety,' she said plaintively to my lord; 'and he had always been jealous of Elizabeth. 'Why could he not let her

alone? She was not a child now to be in leading-strings; and really, in the dull life to which their straitened circumstances doomed them, it was a blessing that she could find anything to amuse her. If she liked to have dirty little children about her, and give them tea and cakes in the park, there was plenty of room and no one suffered. And if she chose to admit this wonderful young man—this hideous young Stagg—and to talk to him as if he were a human being like any other, that was her affair, and no other person's. She, my lady, supposed the girl was not thinking of marrying him; and it was very amiable of her to try to make him less odious than he was. In view of his responsibilities, indeed, it was more than amiable—it was meritorious; for, assuredly, the napkin in which this immense nugget was wrapped left much to be desired on the score of pattern and get-up generally.'

By the grace of which reasoning it came about that Lady Elizabeth was unmolested; that Lord Eustace went back to his regiment decidedly not the victor; and that Caleb Stagg

was made free of those wide and shallow stairs which led up to Lady Elizabeth's quaint and artistically-furnished room.

This was one of the doors which opened for him in some sense consequent on that sale of Redhill Braes. Perhaps, if my lord had not pouched those two extra values he might have objected. As things were, being a gentleman, he felt that a certain return was necessary. If his Delight liked to take the burden on her own graceful shoulders and make return in this manner of kindness to the omadhaun, that was her affair; and he was proportionately grateful. So the matter rested; and Lord Eustace looked on them all as a trifle mad; and, as his parting shot, assured his sister that not a man in all his set would dream of marrying her, so wanting in the pride, the self-respect, the dignity of her order as she was.

Thus it came about that Caleb was really a good deal at the Dower House, which at one time he would rather have gone into a lion's den than enter; and that Lady Elizabeth, taking her mother's view of his responsibilities, and

agreeing with her as to the pattern and get-up of the napkin, did what she could to bring this heir to millions somewhat into line with at least the ordinary gentry of the country. If she could make him so that he might pass muster among them—as of the lowest rank truly, but of a rank lifted above that of the proletariat, washed and brushed and in his Sunday clothes—she would have done all she hoped and all that seemed possible. And her example influenced others.

It influenced Mrs. Clanricarde perhaps more than any other. Where Lady Elizabeth went, meaner folk might follow; and Mrs. Clanricarde followed so fast as to outrun her pioneer altogether. Her door opened as wide as it would go; and not a week passed without some expression of maternal interest on the part of the mother of Estelle for the only son of that rough-hewn Croesus of Redhill. But it was up-hill work. Caleb responded to her invitations with far less zeal and much rarer acquiescence than to those of Lady Elizabeth or Mrs. Stewart. And when he did respond, and did render him-

self according to her bidding, he was so shy and awkward, so abashed and distressed, that the lady felt her efforts were all in vain—like the labours of Sisyphus or the pursuit of a flying phantom. Still she persevered. No battle is lost till it is won, she thought to herself. Between her resolve to domesticate Caleb Stagg and his distress and evident disinclination to submit to the process, who would win?

‘It shall not be he,’ said the Frenchwoman, setting her teeth hard when she read the young man’s refusal to the third invitation she had sent him.

‘But if he does not want to come, poor fellow, why ask him, mother?’ said Estelle, full of compassion for the unhappy creature whom her mother so amiably persecuted and so hospitably distressed.

‘It is our duty,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde with admirable self-command. ‘As Lady Elizabeth says, it is such a pity that the owner of such large responsibilities should be so little fitted to use them.’

‘But it makes him so unhappy,’ said Estelle.

‘He is miserable all the time he is here. He gives me the impression of a worm that has been trodden on. I am sure he is far happier with his own people than with us.’

‘You might be of more use to him than you are, my dear,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde. ‘Young people understand each other so much better than they understand us older folk. If you would take him in hand, as Lady Elizabeth does, you would perhaps make something of a gentleman of him.’

‘He seems even more miserable with me than with you,’ objected Estelle.

‘That is because he sees that you shrink from him—that you despise him,’ said her mother.

‘No; I do not despise him, mother,’ returned Estelle, gravely; ‘that would be uncharitable and unchristian.’

‘Yes, that is just what it is,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, a little eagerly. ‘It is really uncharitable, really unchristian, Estelle, and I am very sorry to see my daughter cherish such an unholy temper. You know that I am not one of your

dreadful Democrats, and that I hold to the distinction of classes and all that—but this is different. It is not an ordinary case at all. God has endowed these people with wonderful means, either for good or evil; and it is our duty—all of us—to do what we can to ensure that they shall be for good.'

'Yes; I see,' said Estelle slowly.

'So that I hope, my dear, you will be kinder to this poor desolate young man,' continued Mrs. Clanricarde, bringing down the hammer of principle once more on the heated iron of sympathy. 'You are doing a religious duty, remember; and Lady Elizabeth sets you the good example.'

Warmed by her mother's words, and with all her conscience aroused, Estelle took heart of grace for her charitable work; and the next time that Caleb Stagg suffered himself to be caught she was so sweet and kind and gentle that her trodden worm scarce knew on what leaf he was resting, nor what bird was singing there in the bushes overhead. As he sat by her side while she showed him her drawings, his

pug-dog face beamed with inner glory, and his round eyes shone with a light that went near to redeem their insignificance. He had that look of being, as it were, coated with bliss—enveloped in a kind of ecstatic spiritual garment—which for the time lifts up the human being into a region higher than its own. He even forgot to be ungainly; and Self fell from him like a mask. But this state lasted for a moment only. Things went back to their normal ugliness, and poor Caleb was once more the omadhaun whose social crassitude and personal awkwardness seemed as unlikely to be subdued as the Alps when Hannibal marched up their steeps. It was the fate of Sisyphus again; and the stone once more rolled back to earth.

And at this moment Mrs. Clamricarde hated the young millionaire, and would have slain him if she could. But Estelle was not so passionately discouraged as her mother. She had not the same reasons.

‘Poor fellow!’ she thought pityingly. ‘What a misfortune to be so shy and ungainly! And

fancy his being so much afraid of me! As if anyone in the world need be afraid of me!

And then she thought of Charlie Osborne—dear, handsome, well-mannered Charlie, that *facile princeps* among men, who could do everything better than anyone else, and who was the dearest fellow in the world—as beautiful in heart as he was in person—and without a flaw that she, his lover, and, in a manner, his worshipper, could discover! Ah, if mother would only believe in him as he deserved to be believed in, and allow the engagement between them to be openly confessed—standing four square on that solid ground of future success—that ground which was to Estelle as true as the jasper foundations of the Great City wall!

But mother was inexorable on this point. It was like asking one parched with thirst to eat ham and anchovies, to beseech her, penniless as she was, to allow of a prospective marriage and present engagement between her daughter and Charlie Osborne—burying her one available talent in the earth, and planting her best investment in foredoomed failure! It was absurd to

ask it—it would be criminal madness to grant it. And there the matter ended, and no more need be said.

Which was but cold comfort for Estelle to carry on her quivering little lip, when Charlie had urged her to press his claim on Mrs. Clanricarde once again, as so often before—when, perhaps, he had written a letter as sad as tears and as warm as living blood, and had had for all response a negative as sharp as knives and as cold as it was sharp. Then the two poor tortured lovers had nothing for it but to hold each other by the hand; look into each other's beautiful eyes; swear to be faithful through life and unto death; and separate in haste—fear of detection mingled with doubt whether they could meet again to-morrow, on Estelle's side doubled with shame at her deceit. For by this time Charlie was forbidden Les Saules altogether; and his intercourse with Estelle was contraband from start to finish.

And really, for a girl who had been properly educated and sagely lectured, to have to run like a lapwing under cover of a hedge, then

suddenly to appear in the garden sauntering up the broad-walk as cool as a cucumber, with eyes yet bright from unshed tears, and lips a little redder than usual by force of being unduly pressed—really, to have to stoop to these subterfuges for the sake of a lover as against a mother, is a trial to the conscience of a severe kind.

No wonder, then, to indemnify that mother for this unconfessed infraction of her orders the poor girl made herself so sweet and gentle to Caleb Stagg that he was sometimes dazed as by a vision of glory, and sometimes made to feel like a bruised worm trodden under foot by a bird of paradise. Then he would plunge into the woods and bury himself out of sight; or he would mount the fells and disappear over the other side; and often, in these latter days, he would lie down with his face turned to the earth, and sob like a child for some strange pain about his heart for which he could give no name nor cause. When in these moods, he used to be so still that the birds flew low about him and the bees buzzed round his

hair, losing their way among this queer and barren heather. Hours would pass while he was in this state, half of trance and half of agony. He did not know his place, nor did he take note of time; he was only conscious of suffering—he did not know why. It seemed to him as if he bore on his heart all the sorrows of the world—as if he and nature made common cause with death, and joy was blotted out for ever. And then sometimes this mood would pass, for nothing more intrinsic than the cry of a lark in the sky or the sunlight shining on a tract of grass of Parnassus or on the bronzed spikes of the bog asphodel; and a strange cloud of glory would envelope him so that life was like the heaven fulfilled of one's desire.

Changeable as an April day, he did not know himself at times—and, if he did not, still less did his parents. Miles was of the two the more seriously disturbed. He thought his lad was losing such wits as he ever had; but Nancy said it was just dyspepsia—which she pronounced 'dishpepsy'—and prescribed peppermint-drops as a fine remedy. Then the mood would pass al-

together, and not a trace of this dreamy madness would remain. Invitations would come either from the vicarage or from the Clanricardes, from the curate or the doctor, the retired major or the half-pay captain; and Caleb would go to the gatherings with the rest and be the 'cynosure' on more accounts than one. Or Lady Elizabeth would write to him for information on such and such point of natural history; when the door of that blue boudoir would be open to him, and he would sit, as in the courts of the Temple, with prayer in his heart and incense in his hands. And when he had been with Lady Elizabeth he was calmer, more reconciled with himself and life, and fitter for such duties as fell to his share. She had that power over him, which some women possess, of soothing the perturbed spirit, as when a cool hand rests lightly on a fevered brow. Had it not been for her, the poor old omadhaun would have found things harder than they were; though why they should be hard at all was a puzzle to him, for which he had no solution handy.

Every now and then he broke into verse,

which he could not make scan. Every now and then he burst into song like the note of the screech-owl. He was changing, manifestly; but as yet he was like a ship that has altered her course but has missed stays, and is, for the moment, emphatically nowhere. The Redhill miner lad, whom so lately no one had known, was now quite a personage in the place; and, though he was as roughly cast and rudely moulded as could well be, he was, all the same, the Golden Calf to those wanderers in the desert of impecuniosity; and being golden, though a calf, was gently entreated and courteously entertained. What only son—whose father would give three times its market value for a piece of land, bearing mostly ragwort and thistles, and pay the money down like a man, on the spot, neither discount asked nor objection made—would not have been? No wonder that he was made much of by the society of Kingshouse! No wonder that he was courted by Mrs. Clamricarde, to whom at this moment Cymon still in the rough, Caliban, Frankenstein's monster, Satan himself if a millionaire, would have been welcome as a potential

son-in-law!—and no wonder that, as a consequence, this unwonted excitement was almost too much for him, and, together with other things, disturbed his mental equilibrium somewhat gravely.


CHAPTER VII.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

BOUND up with all these changes in social standing and consideration was a corresponding increase in Caleb's painful personal humility. Formerly he had been simply conscious of those more material conditions which made him unfit for the society of the well-born and delicately-nurtured. He never lost the sense of the barrow between his hands ; he never felt himself more than a superficially-educated miner, brushed and washed and in his better clothes for Sundays and off-days—but always the miner whose business lay with picks and shovels, skips and trolleys—even when he was reading Homer and Æschylus, or following biological developments through a microscope.

Now his self-depreciation swept a wider circle and made a deeper groove. The more he saw of these nobler creatures—these vessels of finer clay—the more he despised himself body and mind, outside and in. He had formerly seen himself as merely a worker, perhaps a little better than the most loutish of his kind ; but, being a worker, therefore not on an equality with the leisured class. Now he looked on himself as, in truth, a kind of brute-man body and soul, not yet emerged from the husk of animalism. His consciousness of demerit, of personal and intellectual boorishness, of spiritual and æsthetic failure all through, became morbid and diseased—a pain as sharp as knives in his flesh. But this pain varied. Before Lady Elizabeth he felt as any man might if the Madonna of God had turned his eyes inward, so that he saw the true substance of his own gross earthly nature when compared with her divine sweetness, her ethereal purity. Before Estelle Clarricarde he was as the Beast when he stood by the gate while Beauty passed him by, her eyes fixed elsewhere—her heart closed against him.

Estelle did not stand so far above him as Lady Elizabeth, yet she caused him more self-humiliation and far more bitterness of regret. With Lady Elizabeth he was purely and simply the inferior creature, conscious of his inferiority, but in a sense not humiliated because equality was impossible. With Estelle he wished that this equality had been a fact and fought against the fetters, forged by nature, that bound him to such low relative conditions. The one was the Divine—superior, unattainable, and not to be profaned by sinful man with even the desire of near approach; the other was the beautiful and gracious Human, with whom he might have been on a level had fate and the stars been kind. There was no essential reason why he and she should not have stood on the same plane. Circumstance, not substance, separated them; and the separation was a pang. It was the birth-hour of his soul with the one—of his social humanity with the other. In both he suffered; but the pangs of the latter were unspeakable and unappeasable, while the joys in the former overshadowed the pain. When



the soul confesses its sins, is not the very confession self-healing? We have no shame before God as before man. We weep more but blush less, and the Divine Hand has balm in the hollow, even when it smites; but who does not know that sting in the human fingers which yet seem to caress?

To those who cannot read the secret writing of the heart, and from whom all subtleties are hidden, it might have seemed anomalous enough that, to Lady Elizabeth, the nobler character and more highly-placed personage, this poor translated miner should have been so far more at his ease than with Estelle—younger, slighter, less supreme in all things than was the earl's daughter. The psychologist would have read the 'mot d'enigme.' But then psychologists worthy of the name are about as many as there are fingers on your hand; while those who read only as they see, and understand nothing beyond, are in their millions with the grains of sand on the sea-shore. Assuredly there was no mind-reader in Kingshouse who could have solved the problem had it been set him. Caleb

himself could not ; though he often wondered why he should feel soothed and released when with Lady Elizabeth while tongue-tied and tormented with Estelle—abashed if she spoke to him ; in an agony of humiliation if she passed him by ; and always with the sense of some despite wrought him by an unfriendly fortune, such as need not have been had the powers which ruled men's destinies so willed.

And all this time his father added to his anguish by his coarse congratulations whenever he came home from one of those Kingshouse gatherings—his ripe imagination plucking the fruit that was not yet even in the bud, when he urged his son to carry the earl's daughter in terms that burnt the poor fellow's heart within him like so much shrivelled parchment—each word a letter of fire showing the terrible distance between his new friends and his old home—what they were, and what he and his could never be. Then he would consume his nights and waste his days in fruitless despair ; and the white-winged dove of peace flew from him over the void as if never to return.

Meanwhile, all this mental torture was hidden from the two who caused it. To Lady Elizabeth poor Caleb was a well-desiring, well-deserving, unformed but capable creature to instruct and develop; to Estelle he was a human animal to whom, for compassion's sake, she was as gentle as she would have been to a horse or a dog, but with whom she felt no more possibility of comradeship and infinitely less familiarity of affection. Of a truth, it was the Beauty and the Beast; and the Beast was the sacrifice.

Sometimes a horrible thought crossed Estelle's mind, but it was one so degrading to her mother as well as to herself as to be almost blasphemous. And yet she could not wholly banish it. Mrs. Clanricarde, usually so intolerant of all social solecisms, so hard to all 'rotouriers,' as she used to call those who were not up to her own level, was so wonderfully kind to this round-faced, sandy-haired, snub-nosed omdaun—this Caleb Stagg, who at the best was but a well-washed miner with a smattering of science and literature! She asked him still oftener and oftener to the house, and pushed

Estelle into such close companionship as to make his visits so much torture to her, while they broke up those secret little meetings which up to now had kept her heart light and Charlie Osborne's alive, and had helped to sweeten the bitter cup they had perforce to drink. She spoke to him with almost maternal tenderness—she, Mrs. Clanricarde, the sharpest-tongued critic in Kingshouse! She dilated on his goodness, his fine intelligence, his purity of mind, his honour, generosity, down to his native courtesy and good feeling. 'One of nature's gentlemen,' she used to say, levelling her keen black eyes at her daughter with a meaning behind them that made Estelle shiver.

What did it all portend? Her mother's praises pricked the poor girl like witches' needles. She felt their invisible points and smarted under them, but she had to keep silence. Of what good to cry out? and to whom could she cry? Lady Elizabeth's liking for the Beast sealed her lips to her; and Charlie had enough troubles to bear as things were—she need not add to them her own share.

Never had Mrs. Clanricarde 'voiced aloud with shriller throat' her views on the unimportance of the man and the all-importance of the purse in marriage. Never had her scorn for personal love and physical beauty been hotter, more pungent, more severe. To hear her, one would have thought love before marriage the doom of happiness after, and a man's beauty not only a snare but a sin. She dwelt on the superiority of moral graces and intellectual soundness to all else, till Estelle's fair face grew wan and white with secret loathing, and Caleb's flamed with thoughts to which he dared give neither form nor voice. He was modest to self-abasement, but even he could not fail to see that Mrs. Clanricarde substantially offered him her daughter, and told him that the way was clear and the running already made for him. But Estelle herself? The verdict in her averted eyes was differently framed and spelt from that in Mrs. Clanricarde's; and Caleb was too sensitive to confound compassion with affection. He knew that he was but the Beast to her—no more desirable than Caliban—as little lovely as

the hunchback, within whose hump, however, are folded the wings which will one day carry him to heaven. And, as something under the ban of Love, he bore himself with the patience, the very dignity, indeed, of self-effacement, and the quiet hopelessness which accepts the doom of fate and yields to the pressure of the inevitable.

Near to Les Saules ran the prettiest lane in the district. Deep, leafy, cool, fern-full, it matched for beauty a water-lane in Guernsey or one of those deep-cut Devonshire ways which wind like ribands between the high, hedge-topped banks and flowery meadows. It led to the Close—a wood made by man and Nature for Love.

Love, unspoken, estranged, content—for all its phases this wood had special shrines and green-arched temples where to rest and be refreshed. It was the favourite place of meeting for Estelle and Charlie Osborne; and to both every fern and tree and flower was sanctified and carried its own secret message and reminder. It had also become a favourite hunting-ground

with Caleb Stagg, being full of precious creatures not to be found elsewhere.

It was on one of those rare days in England when the house must empty itself and the world must be abroad. Carriage folks drive; horsemen ride; the cyclist flashes past like a huge spider on a glancing thread; the humbler people walk; the humbler still, sit about their cottage doors and transact their household business on the step. No one, not an invalid, consents to remain within those stifling four walls of home; and the Clanricardes had been touched by the all-pervading œstrum with the rest.

‘Come for a little walk, Estelle,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde to her daughter.

And Estelle, who really loved her mother, though she feared her—and at this moment hated her line of action—was glad to go. But she knew by that secret ‘telepathy’ which lovers have as a sixth sense—by one of those ‘messengers which love sends to and fro,’ and of which the earth is full—that Charlie was waiting for her in the wood—there, behind the

old beech-tree to the right, which was their place of meeting. Still, she was glad to go with her mother. The undoubted cloud at present between them pained her sorely, and she would have given many drops of her rose-red blood could she have cleared it away.

‘Where shall we go, mother?’ she asked, kissing her mother as in the days now grown unhappily a little old.

‘Oh! anywhere,’ answered Mrs. Clanricarde.

‘To Grantown?’ proposed Estelle.

Grantown was a picturesque little hamlet, about a mile from Les Saules, across the fields, and by the river. It was a charming walk, and one of the points of the place.

‘No,’ answered Mrs. Clanricarde.

‘Towards the Dower House?’—another pretty leafy way.

‘No,’ she replied again.

‘Where, then, mother?’ was Estelle’s perplexed demand.

‘To the Close,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde.

‘Will it not be very stifling there to-day?’

asked Estelle, with as much indifference as she could command.

‘No, it will be cool,’ said her mother.

And Estelle had nothing to object. It would be cool in the wood. Undoubtedly, from a layman’s point of view, it was the very place for the day. But to the initiated—that word, that gesture, that press of the finger has a very different meaning from anything the outsider knows! There was nothing for it, however, but to acquiesce; and the two went by the little side-walk into the leafy lane which led to the deep-bosomed wood. But all Estelle’s joy had gone, and the cloud between her and her mother lowered more dense than before.

They sauntered down the lane—Estelle, bitten with an insane desire for wild flowers, lingering greatly as she went—till they came to the gate which opened into the paradise of her heart. A hundred yards further on, round the projection made by an overhanging rock, and they would come in sight of the beech-tree under which she knew that Charlie Osborne was sitting. Her only hope was that, hearing

their voices, he would hide himself away in time, and not let the very shadow of his shadow be seen by the mother whose eyes were as quick as her thoughts. Even the 'helmet of Hades' itself would have been sure to have a broken strap or a loose buckle if Mrs. Clanricarde had been set on discovering the wearer.

The girl's uneasiness was too great to be concealed. Her very efforts to appear indifferent betrayed her anxiety. The way in which she talked—so volubly, so unlike herself—and the sharper ring of her voice, more highly pitched than usual and thrown out as if for other ears than her mother's—all were eloquent enough for Mrs. Clanricarde, who had missed her vocation and her epoch. She should have been one of Fouché's 'souricières'; when she would have made her fortune, dug out of the graves of those she had overshadowed.

Suspecting, watching, she said never a word—only paid out the rope which Estelle twisted yet tighter round her slender throat. Then they rounded the rock, and, with one rapid look—caught by Mrs. Clanricarde as a sportsman

shoots flying—the girl's heart gave one full bound of relief—Charlie Osborne was not there. But in his stead, peering on all sides—now his nose flattened against the bark of a tree; now down on the ground turning over last year's dead leaves and dry twigs; a butterfly-net in his hand, some creatures in his hat, a green tin case strapped round him, in full pursuit of his fancy, riding his hobby knees and chin together—they came upon Caleb Stagg searching for creatures in Estelle's sacred grove where her god was hidden. Then Mrs. Clanricarde blessed herself for her insistence, and looked on her decision as providential and inspired.

To Estelle it was the other way; and, what to her mother was the benevolent work of the good angels, was to her the undoubted mischief-making of the bad.

Caleb blushed when he met them, as of course he would; but the mother caught on the wing a look in his eyes, as she had caught that in her daughter's. And it was a look that satisfied her. She had made up her mind. Estelle should marry the omadhaun, failing a better

provision. If anyone more eligible should come along, then the poor omadhaun would be thrown over with no more remorse than we have when we drop one peach in favour of another better favoured to the eyes and softer to the touch.

‘A lucky chance!’ she said, in her kindest way, as she put out her hand for Caleb’s, dirt-begrimed as it was.

Instinctively he wiped his hand on his coat before he gave it.

‘I’m not fit,’ he said, bashfully.

‘The hand of an honest man is always fit—fit for a queen,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, with royal condescension of air and manner.

Her compliment was really regal. Her appreciation of essential qualities was grandly philosophic—nobly heroic.

Caleb blushed again, as painfully as before; and Estelle lifted her pretty chin and curled her lips with the daintiest little line of disdain—which he saw and writhed under, as if it had been a barbed arrow in his breast.

‘Let us go and sit there,’ said Mrs. Clanri-

carde, pointing to the seat beneath the beech-tree on the right.

‘Oh, mother!’ exclaimed Estelle, hurriedly. ‘We shall be eaten up by midges!’ she added, after a second’s pause, to explain and conceal the very pronounced opposition—the opposition that was a prayer and a cry—in her voice.

‘No more there than elsewhere,’ returned Mrs. Clanricarde, smoothly, as she turned up the trodden path to the tree. ‘Come, Mr. Stagg; come with us, and show us your interesting collection,’ she added, sweetly, to Caleb. ‘I know that Estelle will be glad to see it.’

‘Do you care for creatures, Miss Clanricarde?’ asked Caleb, awkwardly.

‘She is devoted to them,’ put in Mrs. Clanricarde before Estelle could answer.

‘I did not know that I was, mother,’ said Estelle, her face white, as it was wont to grow when her mother flung her too openly at the omadhaun’s head. Besides, she knew that Charlie Osborne was within earshot somewhere, spying at them through the smoke coloured glasses of jealousy.

‘Indeed, I should be glad if you would give her some instruction, Mr. Stagg,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, ignoring Estelle’s disclaimer. ‘It is so much better to work under the guidance of a master—and such a good master as you would be.’

She smiled benignly. The present need at home was great. Nothing but a rich marriage, with a margin for herself and that fatal husband of hers, would save them. It was a pity—surely a pity!—that she had no better salvation in view than Caleb Stagg; but in the storm who cares for the beauty of the port?

‘I should be sorry to take up Mr. Stagg’s time,’ said Estelle, in a clear, renunciatory voice.

‘It would be a pleasure, Miss Clanricarde,’ said Caleb, in a low one.

‘I should like it,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, a little shrilly. ‘We will begin our first lesson now, if you please, Mr. Stagg,’ she added, with a laugh yet more shrill than her spoken words had been.

And Caleb, opening his case, began his roll-call of names and characteristics of which neither mother nor daughter understood one word, nor

from which they gained one rational idea. But Mrs. Clanricarde thanked him with the most enthusiastic and becoming effusiveness when he had finished; and, catching at the one word which she had retained, called the sulphur-moth a coleoptera, and thought she showed her tact and quick study in that term. But Estelle said little that was pleasant and nothing that was encouraging.

‘It is far too difficult for me, and I hate those long, learned names,’ she said, coldly.

Charlie hated all science, too, and looked on scientific nomenclature as a kind of spiritual deformity—next thing to a crime. She knew that her confession of faith, which she felt sure was heard somehow by him, would please him.

‘We must have them, you see, Miss Clanricarde,’ said Caleb, humbly apologizing for the necessities of science. ‘They make a kind of general language for all nations. A Russian’—he pronounced it ‘Rooshian’—‘or a Frenchman, or an Englishman, they all know what “papilio vanessa” means, but the “peacock butterfly” would not carry far.’

‘Still, science is horrid. Art and poetry are the only things worth living for,’ said Estelle, in the same rather unnaturally high-pitched voice she had had throughout.

‘I know nothing of either,’ said Caleb, sadly.

‘You are none the worse for that, Mr. Stagg,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, with her ambiguous smile. ‘Poets and artists generally are wretchedly poor creatures, not worth their salt. I so much prefer honest merit and more solid acquirements.’

‘Mother! as if the greatest gifts God has to give should be spoken of so slightingly!’ cried Estelle, in hot haste and hotter anger. ‘Why, what should we be without poetry and art—mere earthworms, knowing nothing of the diviner things of life—seeing nothing but ourselves, and shut out from heaven!’ This was Charlie’s latest phrase; and Mrs. Clanricarde knew it. ‘Science is soul-destroying,’ continued Estelle, still hot and eager. ‘Scientific people are atheists.’

‘Not necessarily, my dear child,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, blandly.

‘I think not all, Miss Clanricarde,’ said Caleb, humbly.

‘I hate science, and all that is scientific,’ said Estelle, almost in tears; ‘and nothing should ever make me learn it.’

‘Come to dinner to-morrow, Mr. Stagg,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde. ‘I give you this foolish child of mine to convert from her dreams to your better ways.’

‘Mother, this is too bad!’ flamed out Estelle. ‘I will not take lessons from Mr. Stagg.’

‘Come to dinner, Mr. Stagg,’ repeated Mrs. Clanricarde; and the unhappy pendulum, swung thus between mother and daughter, had no excuse ready. Yet he would have liked to refuse, only he could not see the loophole.

‘She will have none of me,’ he said to himself as he trudged through the wood, no longer a place of enchantment for him. ‘Her mother will, for they are but in a poor way, and father’s means would set them bravely up; but that dainty blossom is not for the like of me, and she will not, were it ever so. I feel her tremble with disgust and shame when I touch her

hand. God help me! but the smart is sore.'

All this time Charlie had been lying hidden within the bracken, which grew in a miniature forest among the underwood. He had heard every word, and through the crossing stems which gave one clear passage not larger than his eye he had seen every gesture, every look. He understood the whole play. She was to be sacrificed to that cad, that ruffian, that low-lived beast, sitting in his own especial place beneath their holy trysting-tree. There was no term of obloquy, however unfitting, that Charlie did not shower on Caleb Stagg—he whose own humility rated him low enough, as things were—he who would willingly give his life for Estelle's good, and whose sacrifice would be as his crowning, if it ensured her gain. But Charlie's thought was only after the rule and line of men's judgments on each other. The glass through which we read hearts and motives is indeed dark; and few of us have enough unselfishness or love to clear it.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVERS' VOWS.

A CHANGE had come into Estelle's sweet face. It had lost its normal shyness for what was a look of fear; and something of that watching, suspicious, hunted sharpness, which belongs to those who have a secret to hide, had taken the clearness out of her candid eyes. Between her lover and her mother, she had come to moral grief. Devoted to each, but adding to her love for Charlie fear to hurt him and determination to be faithful—to her love for her mother, that piety of obedience natural to a gently-nurtured girl—she had fallen into deceit and intrigue. Of course the knowledge that it was 'for Charlie' justified a great deal, as it always does in love; but the fact remained the same—she

was deceiving her mother, and thereby committing a sin which covered her soul with spiritual shame.

For herself she could have been strong enough to give up this sweet, secret fault, but, when she spoke of it to Charlie, her tears of self-accusation, her gentle prayers to be rendered back to the ways of truth and uprightness, failed against the overmastering need of his egotism—the passionate demands of his love. He softened her moral fibre by the softness of his own, and his tears of supplication dried hers of remonstrance. Then things would go on as before. The meetings, which played with Estelle's very life, were planned and executed with almost double zest for the break which had seemed too likely to come. But Mrs. Clanricarde's suspicions were aroused. She was not a nature-born 'souricière' for nothing; and, by the very fact that she suspected some kind of underhand association between Estelle and that fascinating, detrimental Charlie Osborne, she determined to push on this matter with Caleb Stagg, and to force her daughter into the life-

long misery and financial redemption of a marriage which would be eminently a gilded horror and legalized slavery.

‘She would get over it,’ the mother argued. ‘Other women have had to suppress their own feelings in favour of their family need, and marry where they did not love, leaving behind them the desired and adored. So must she. No one is absolutely unique in this life, and the rod with which souls are ruled by society is heavy and impartial. We all have to submit—so must Estelle. With such a father her fate was predestined. If anyone was to blame it was George—that luckless pilot of the financial ship—that sieve through which money ran as fast as the water which the Danaïdes were doomed to bring! To him were principally owing all the difficulties of the house by which Estelle was to be made to suffer in her person—according to the way of women and the weaker.’

So she glozed over her conscience, and added to her reasoning a thick layer of whitewash for poor Caleb, whereby she got rid of a great many of his defects, and made him out at last

to be really quite personal and presentable. His 'good heart' stood for so much! Shakespeare and Burns were both quoted in his behalf, and the skimmings of his science and his classics stood for thick, rich, soul-sustaining cream.

'So much better,' she used to say, 'solid knowledge of the kind Mr. Stagg possessed, than the mere flashy, trumpery accomplishments of painting a little, and rhyming a little, and playing a little—such as certain ignorant young men, too idle for hard, substantial work, made out were the noblest things a man could do!'

When she let fly these arrows Estelle generally put up the buckler of silence and always edged away from the subject. She knew that her mother wanted to be more explicit and to 'have it out' with her; and she dreaded only one thing more—the discovery of her secret trysts with Charlie.

Of late, since that encounter with Caleb Stagg in the wood, those trysts had been considerably fewer. In some subtle way, she never could define how nor yet could she circumvent, Mrs.

Clanricarde kept Estelle closer than ever by her side. There was always some little domestic duty to be done that held her indoors and prevented her liberty. It was nothing irksome and nothing overt; and the requests to stay with her and do this and that, were made with so much sweetness—such perfect unconsciousness that a fond daughter should find anything unpleasant in association with so charming, so sympathetic, so delightful a mother—that poor Estelle's heart was torn into still more painful bits, and she scarce knew where to turn or what to do. Charlie eating out his heart in the wood; her's lacerated in the house; her lover's yearning and her mother's pleasant command—poor Estelle! And then, to crown all, the frequent presence of the snub-nosed omdahau and her mother's extraordinary craze in his favour!

For himself, poor fellow, this time was a time of torture to Caleb. He saw the whole play, and suffered from it as such a man naturally would. Not to gain the kingdom of heaven for himself would he have forced Estelle's inclina-

tion—taking her on her mother's invitation against her own desire. And yet, would he have been human not to have desired? Lady Elizabeth alone knew what he felt, and to her alone he showed the hidden wound that was destroying the value of his life—to her, always his goddess, his Madonna, to worship and to serve, to love and adore, but the hem of whose garment was as sacred as the veil of Isis, and not to be carried to his lips nor touched by his hands.

In this way things were not much advanced, nor did they seem likely to advance. Mrs. Clanricarde offered Estelle to the rich miner as evidently as if she had made the proposal in so many words; Caleb, ever more and more distraught by the mother's patent desire, let the sweet poison of that proffered and yet self-forbidden presence creep nearer and nearer to his soul. Estelle's revulsion against him grew stronger with her mother's increased advocacy; Charlie Osborne's feverish despair grew greater as the sacrilege which now all Kingshouse was discussing seemed almost possible. These

stolen meetings were becoming rarer and more perilous, and everything seemed slipping down the decline. Like that village on the slopes of Etna which is kept from sliding down into the valley solely by the huge buttressing rock in front, so, in Caleb's steadfast delicacy—in the very unselfishness of his resolve, was the only salvation of the lovers. When the day should come, if it ever should, when passion would be stronger than this unselfishness, then would the sun see the last of the poor young lovers' happiness—Charlie's death-knell and Estelle's enduring martyrdom. Meanwhile they had still some brief and sparsely-strewn rays of comfort when they met in the shelter of the wood and renewed the dear light of their love, as lovers can, from the airy nothings of hope and the snatched fragments of consolation.

‘Nothing could tempt you to such a sacrifice, Estelle?’ Charlie asked, as he had asked a dozen times before. Lovers' assurances are never enough.

‘Nothing,’ she answered, with fervour. ‘I am very sorry we are so poor—very sorry that

mother is so anxious—but I would no more marry Caleb Stagg than I would jump into the river. I would rather jump into the river, indeed!

‘I do not want to speak harshly of your mother, but I must say she astonishes me!’ said Charlie, tossing back his hair. ‘The only excuse I can make for her is to suppose she is a little off her head. The idea of her thinking of your marrying that cad; still less wishing it! Good heavens! I wonder she is not struck dead for such a crime!’ he said excitedly. ‘It makes my blood curdle, Estelle, and would, even if I did not love you.’

‘It is too dreadful to think of,’ said Estelle shuddering. ‘But, Charlie dear, do not distress yourself. I would rather die than do it.’

‘Or come with me, which would be better than dying,’ he said, looking up into her face.

She stole her hand gently into his—her shy little hand with the pointed fingers and rose-pink nails like transparent shells.

‘A great deal,’ she said softly; and for a moment caressed the idea as possible.

That empty purse dangling between them both, as powerful a line of separation as was ever Sigurd's sword, was forgotten, and only the sweet vision of life and love together remained as fair as Geraldine's pale face seen by Surrey in the magic mirror—as delusive as Rose Mary's picture in the beryl stone.

‘And you will not, Estelle?’ Charlie sank his voice to the softest tones of which spoken music is capable. ‘With you by my side,’ he continued, ‘I could work as I have never worked before, and do great things. It is all this miserable suspense that kills me! If I had but you! Ah! Estelle, it is more than one man's life and love that is sacrificed to these criminal arrangements of society. It is the world's great work! Think! I could do something to make my life splendid and my name famous, and you say you will not have it! Estelle, will you not brave everything and come with me? Would you rather see me die of this fever and yourself the wife of Caleb Stagg?’

‘Oh, Charlie, how cruel you are!’ was all that Estelle could say. Tears were in her voice as

well as in her eyes, and Charlie was in the mood when to make the beloved suffer is some kind of balm to one's own pains.

‘It seems like it,’ he returned, again tossing back his hair. ‘That cad lives in your pocket. All Kingshouse is talking of it, and your mother is offering you to him as if you were a bunch of flowers or a basket of fruit for sale. It is disgusting; it is maddening; and you expect me to stand it! I wonder at myself that I do not put a bullet through the fellow's brain. That is what he deserves.’

‘But he does not make love to me, Charlie,’ said Estelle, earnestly, less moved by this advocacy for care for the truth, or even to defend poor Caleb himself against a false imputation, than to give peace to her lover's tortured mind. ‘He is always most distant and respectful—almost ludicrously so. He does not make love in any way—by word or look.’

‘And your mother offers you, as she does, to a fellow who has not even the grace to acknowledge the prize you are!’ cried Charlie, his sails filling on the other tack.

‘That is better than presumption,’ said Estelle; ‘and less disagreeable to me.’

‘And you can live in such an atmosphere!’ cried Charlie. ‘You know what I suffer, and yet you can support it.’

‘What can I do, dear?’ she asked, in her sweet, gentle way. ‘I cannot forbid my mother to ask him to the house. It would only make her angry and do no good! I must trust to myself, as I have done all along. I will never be false to you, Charlie—never!’

‘You swear that?’ said Charlie, holding her hands as in a vice.

‘Yes, I swear it,’ she returned.

‘By your hopes of salvation you will be true to me, and me only?’

‘I will!’ she said, her cheeks pale with the very fervour of her vow.

‘No one shall ever take you from me?’

‘No one! no one!’ she repeated.

‘Kiss me, Estelle, on this,’ he said. ‘You have solemnly vowed yourself to me, remember! You are mine in the sight of God and heaven, and if you deceive me you will commit a great

and shameful crime. No man can now call you wife without your perjury—your infidelity—too gross to give it a name. Now I hold you mine for ever! for ever!

‘You always have,’ said Estelle, simply. ‘Ever since we were boy and girl together I have loved you, Charlie, and you know it. I *could* not love anyone else!’

‘Nor I you,’ he answered. ‘Women think they have all the constancy, but they have not. Men are far more constant. And it counts more with us than with you, for we have more temptations.’

‘Yes,’ said Estelle, dutifully; and her lover caught the word on her lip and kept it there with his own.

Talks such as these were the very wine of life to Charlie. He drooped and flagged without them, and felt as if all the forces of God and nature were arrayed against him. When he had had this spell of refreshment he was another man. His pulses beat more slowly, his blood was not so heated, the thronging fancies of his brain were lighter, his thoughts were gayer,

and his life was not the wretched blunder it seemed to be when Estelle was not its potent centre, and only doubt held him by the hand and loneliness spread over him her black veil. Yes, he felt sure of her. He knew how much she loved him. For all their lives this love had been the main fact of feeling. It had grown with their growth from childhood up to now, full youth. Like the vine, which flings its branches from tree to tree, it had bound them in one firm, fragrant bondage. Force might separate them, as force might sever the vine; but nature would only keep them more closely tied. He had no real fear of Caleb Stagg, though it suited his jealous exactingness to feign it for the pleasure of assurance. He had no fear of anyone, indeed, but himself. Should he ever be able to keep a wife? Times were bad for art; and he had not yet got his foot securely placed on one of all the rungs of the great Ladder of Success. Should he ever?—with a heart that failed him on a climb; with cheeks which flushed a hectic red on small exertion; with that cough which so often tormented him;

that fever which so often consumed him? Nevertheless, he loved; and he had the lover's unconscious and imperative selfishness. As now, when he held Estelle to his heart at the parting of the ways, and made her swear again and again, by all her hopes of salvation, that she would be true to him for time and eternity—true to him as he to her; and that she would never marry anyone else, so help her God! So might God do to her as she to him, if ever she forsook him, her own true love!

CHAPTER IX.

IN DOUBT AND DREAD.

ALLURED by Mrs. Clanricarde ; spurred on by his father, who, however, was in a wrong latitude altogether ; conscious of the ‘*res angusta*’ in the home of her he loved, and without private means of his own to help her secretly, as else he would ; personally loathed by Estelle, and knowing that he was, while he himself loved her with the mingled passion, hopelessness and humility of an inferior for one raised above him by origin, and placed within his power to protect by fortune—poor Caleb’s sense of general haze and confusion rendered his life at this moment a real tragedy—if we allow that feelings are as tragic as events. Shaken and distraught, he

scarce knew what he ought to do; for nothing is harder than to hold fast by our own clear perceptions of the inappropriate and impossible against reasonings and enticements which go the same way as our inclinations. No 'cross-hatching' of the engraver is fuller of interrupted lines and angles than the mind of one so tempted while so convinced; and Caleb spent his days and nights in wondering whether; and if; and could it be; and no! it never could; and he was a fool for his pains—none bigger.

Yet often the flattering thought passed through his brain, like a shooting-star cleaving the dark heavens before his eyes: 'I would make her so good a husband—I would so tenderly care for her—so guard her from all pain and trouble—I would worship and reverence her so deeply that in time she would learn to care for me. And if she could never love me as I love her, she would at least come to peace with herself and forbearance with me. I would love her so that she must at least endure, and perhaps even a little love me!'

Man ever makes the same mistake, and the

loving think that the very gift of love—its very passion and intensity—perforce must win return. Oh, fools and blind! who water the barren rock with your heart's blood, and look for the rare red rose as your reward! As if reluctant love ever was bought, even by love!—as if the heart was not its own free gift, and gratitude for an unshared affection but so much snow new-fallen on the ice! Love may burn at the stake and die a beggar for the beloved; it may stand in the pillory and be pelted by the world; it may give its all—faith, home and fame—as freely as our dying hero gave that cup of water to the wounded soldier; but by the force of its own strength only will it gain nothing in return. Can the sun compel the dew, save by the free gift of the generous earth? Does it rise at his bidding from the shores of the Dead Sea, from the sand of the desert, from the marble rocks of Pentelicus? Yet the same glory pours down on these as on the flower-full meadow—the fragrant garden—where the dew lies thick like living jewels—that lavish boon of beauty given out by the earth in voluntary response. So

with love. If not spontaneous it is not to be compelled; and the heart sheds its blood in vain.

And all this Caleb knew, as well as he knew that the chrysalis must develop according to its own laws, and that folding it in rose-leaves or cushioning it on satin will be of no avail, if the hour of its butterfly birth has not come. Yet he suffered himself to be at times deceived by hope and desire, and the mirage which looked as if it might be real!

His father was not one of the least of his trials at this moment. Not only had his association with the better-bred and more gently nurtured shown Caleb the great gulf fixed between his own people and them—himself and them—but it had also told so far on his own nature as to make him painfully sensitive to things he formerly accepted as of the natural order of life. His father's rude jokes and coarse good-humour had once been as pleasant as those rough-and-tumble larks with the kitchen wench in the hay-loft or the stable-boys in the harness-room. Now the one was as abhorrent as the other, and

he wondered how he could have ever enjoyed a mental diet so coarse and brutal.

When Miles shouted to him, as he came home after he had been with Lady Elizabeth or the Clanricardes: 'Well, lad! how's thy wooing going? When's I to have my lady's daughter to hand into her carriage, and her little one to give his first silver mug to?' Caleb thought, with a shudder, of the sacrilege it would be to see Estelle familiarly treated by such hands; and how could he ask her to come to such a home? Not all the wealth of Golconda could gild over their essential poverty of condition, nor make this gorgeous, flashy, brand-new hideous house of theirs—this cross between a barrack and a gin-palace—fit for her reception. His father to hold her in his arms; to kiss her; to pinch her cheek and dig her in the ribs; to crack jokes at the expense of her delicacy, her modesty; or, if he were so minded, to profane her ears by words and oaths she did not know existed:—His mother, good, weak, painful soul, to treat her as a timid servant might treat a gracious mistress playing at companionship:—

He himself unlovely, ungainly—when he looked at himself in the glass, hot blushes dyed his cheeks, and impotent despair convulsed his heart for shame of the thing he saw—that thing which no woman could love—that Beast for whose salvation no Beauty would give her redeeming kiss.

No, he could not ask her. He had nothing to give her : no family worthy of her adoption ; no home where she ought to abide ; no husband who was fit to touch the tips of her slender fingers, still less take her by the hand and call her sweet body his ! He had nothing but his money that she could value ; his love he knew too well she would not.

Then—his round, light eyes, a little red about the rims, staring into vacancy, and his clumsy, mouth half open—he would look such a pitiful woe-begone creature that old Miles scarce knew whether to laugh in his face for derision or ‘give him a clout on the head’ for wrath. He managed to convey the effect of both by the way in which he used to clap him on the back with that heavy, shoulder-of-mutton fist of

his; while, braying as much as shouting, he would call out in tones that made Caleb writhe and his mother start and quiver with sudden fear:

‘Now then, mooncalf, where be thy wits—a wool-gathering after thy painted bugs or the lasses? Sakes alive! but thou’rt verily the biggest fool that ever walked on two legs since Nebuchadnezzar went on four!’

After such an ordeal as this Caleb would rouse himself and try to do a son’s devoir and be something of a fit companion for his roystering parent. But all that he did was done so faint-heartedly he only fell deeper into the mire of his father’s disgrace, and widened the distance between them, already wide enough as things were. These awkward efforts at congenial festivity of mind and manner were for the most part cut short by a fit of swearing like to the rolling of thunder; when his father would either order him out of his sight for a jackass that was not worth a man’s meat—a half-baked potato that was not fit for a pig to eat; or else he himself would dash out of the room in a rage

that nothing short of a good half-bottle of whisky could reduce into his ordinary wide-mouthed good-humour.

‘That I should be plagued with such double-dyed donnerts as I have!’ he one day said to Jim Fisher, after an outburst of more than usual violence with Caleb. ‘There’s the missis, she’s as dumb as a codfish, and as dunt as a dead neddy; and, except for prayers and parsons, hardly knows her right hand from her left, or which leg to put foremost. She doesn’t know the value of a good gown when she’s got one on her back, and would as lief go in rags as silks and satins. She’s not to be made a lady of, were t’ angel Gabriel himself to put his hand to it! And that lad of hers is not a pound better. Neither one nor t’other knows meat from meal, and whether it’s raw turnmuts or a juicy pear from t’ south wall, they neither take heed or care. She’s only a pit-brow lass when all’s said and done; and, as for the lad, he’s as cracked as an old tin kettle, and fit for nought but to be tied to a dog’s tail and sent a-whuz-zling over t’ fells. He’s not worth his salt, isn’t

Caleb, take him how you will ; and money does him no more good than a sackful of oats to a dead jackass. I'm fairly be't and moidered between the pair of them ; and that's a fact, Jim, let who will hear me !

‘I've always told ye, Miles, ye cannot change the nature of man or beast,’ said Jim, sententiously.

He enjoyed these occasions for taking down his former mate and present master and making him feel that luck was not equal to sense, and that though he, Miles, had the purse it was himself, Jim, who had the brains.

‘The missis is one of them who are frightened at their own shadows, and cannot say bo to a goose, were't ever so ; and her lad is bound to take after her,’ he continued. ‘And then you yourself, Miles, are but a bad paymaster for such as they ; for you have a hard hand and a heavy way with you that doesn't fit with feared folk ; and you don't spare the rough side of your tongue when you've a mind to give 'em a lick, which is as often as you are anyway crossed.’

‘And you'd give 'em a lick too, Jim, let me

tell you, if you were bothered with such a couple of jennies,' retorted Miles.

'I'd know my catechism better,' said Jim, drawing down his long upper lip with puritanical grimness. 'What's the good of wanting pigs to fly, Miles, I ask you? Each creature has its own nature, and your lad and his mother have theirs.'

'Good Lord! what do I ask of 'em!' roared Miles in a fury. 'Only that they should enjoy themselves and take the good of what I've got to give 'em. If I were like some, now, as skimped and grudged, then they might cry out; but I'm not of that make. I want those I have to do with to be as well-off as myself, and to take the good of what I have. If the missis and the lad had a mind to eat off gold, they should have it. And what—the devil take it!—I'd rather they spent like water than be what they are, that lily-livered they can't enjoy themselves any more than a couple of scarecrows in a cherry-tree!'

'Ah, well, you see, Miles, lad, a boy can take a horse to the water, but ten men can't make

him drink. Your folk are not born that way. They don't value all this here'—Jim described a vague circle in space—'and they'll never use themselves to it. That's my opinion, and I'll maintain it.'

'Then,' said Miles with a comprehensive oath that took in the sight of his eyes and the salvation of his soul, 'if they don't and won't I'll wring their necks for them.'

'Just so,' said Jim sedately. 'That's a main brave way to make birds sing.'

On which Miles broke out into a huge Gargantuan laugh, and made a feint to square up to his old mate, as in the days when they were lads together, and were always trying it on with their fists to prove which was the better man of the two, like two bull-calves butting at each other in the farm-yard.

'And thou'd be the better for a jolly good whacking thyself, Jim!' he said, flourishing his huge fists about his old friend's head.

'I doubt if ye'd be able to give it, Miles,' said Jim in his cool, didactic way, which Miles took as the acme of philosophic nobleness. 'Ye've

got too fat and pursy with all your good living, and I'm as lean as a greyhound, as you see, and as hard as an oak plank. I doubt if ye'd come over me, if we set to!

'I'd bray thee into mincemeat!' shouted Miles, with a peal of laughter. 'Only thou'st that lean the very crows wouldn't pick thy bones.'

'And they'd get scomfished in fat before they got at thine,' retorted Jim.

And here the horse-play ended.

But for all that easily-excited laughter and broad good-humour, traversing his irascibility like the shine and shade of a rough-visaged April day, Miles Staggs stuck to his point with the tenacity of his kind, and never ceased to flog the dead horse of his wife's social pride and the jibbing jade of his son's matrimonial ambition. And the more he flogged the colder and stiffer grew the lifeless carcase he sought to stir. Nancy took yet firmer hold of that narrow creed of universal forbidding which made her idea of religion. More and more things became sinful to her; and her husband was the

biggest sin of all. His large appetite and love of good cheer; his fondness for a glass and the flush on his broad, fat, rubicund cheeks; his rattling oaths and Homeric laughter; the money he spent on his house and garden, on his carriages and horses, on gold chains for her and diamond studs for Caleb; his going to church in his carriage like a lord on Sundays, and his preferring church to chapel; all the pomp and magnificence in which he revelled, and, as it were, morally sprawled, like a cat on the warm gravel in the sunshine—all was sinful to poor weak-eyed, meek-spirited Nancy. And the worst of her many secret sorrows was that she had not courage to testify. She dared not openly defy her conjugal master; and thus, between him and her spiritual Lord, and the fear of each, her life was a very torment, which secret weeping and ungrammatical prayers did but little to assuage. Poor Nancy! how much rather she would have gone back to her epicene dress and hard manual labour at the pit-brow than be seated here in her gorgeous drawing-room, in that flaming red tartan satin which

Miles had bought for her and commanded her to wear as she valued her life and head left unbroken—with a heavy gold chain about her neck—her large, thin, flat ears weighted with big diamonds—a brooch like a small saucer at her throat—and on the top of her thin, soft, grizzled hair a cap got out of Bond Street, and about as fit for her as a silver strap for a kicking milch-cow. But the conjugal hand was one not to be ignored nor yet denied; and the burdened soul had to make its peace between fear and sin as it best could.

With Caleb, matters were as bad. That spurring of the jibbing jade went on without intermission; and though the father always navigated in the wrong waters, and set his sails for Lady Elizabeth, Caleb knew that any lady whatever of Kingshouse would be welcome; and Estelle, in her pearly grace and beauty, more welcome than another.

‘Thou shalt have it all, lad,’ Miles used to say, as his biggest bribe. ‘If thou’st shamed of thy own, thou shalt have it all to thyself and my lady yonder. Grapes and peaches, furni-

ture and land, nags and coaches, I'll not keep the value of a brass farthing from thee, more nor I and thy mother'll want for our old age. A clean shirt o' Sundays, lad, and a good glass for a friend, that's all I ask out of the many thousands as we have. Only let me see thee mated with the best in the land, and I'll die content.'

But when Caleb said, as he did once: 'Give me something of my own now, father. Out of so much, you could well spare me a few hundreds in my pocket;' Miles answered him back by such a turbid stream of abuse and ob-jurgation that he never ventured to repeat the experiment.

'All, if thou'll give me a lady for my daughter,' he said. 'All, dost hear, jackass! but, by the Lord, not so much as'll buy thee a crust of bread while thou bides here as my son in my house! I'll be my own ganger and captain of my own ship as long as I'm at the head. I'll give way to thee the day thou hast thy wife, but not an hour sooner. So now you know.'

Which declaration greatly increased the poor

omadhaun's general perplexity, when matched with Mrs. Clanricarde's hints—as broad as cart-wheels, according to Caleb's unspoken simile—with only his own consciousness of unworthiness to keep him steady to his self-imposed negation.

CHAPTER X.

THE CROSSING OF THE RUBICON.

THINGS financial at Les Saules had gone from bad to worse. Mr. Clanricarde's last investments, made in faith, had fructified in failure. One turn more of that Stock Exchange screw, and the bailiffs would take possession; and then, where would Estelle's matrimonial market be? For beauty, although such a splendid jewel in itself, wants a certain amount of material setting to give it stability. A man with intrinsic advantages looks for some kind of equivalent besides that which, great as it is, can be destroyed by an infected laundry or a runaway horse. The value of birth, for instance, is a constant quantity and the multiplication of riches

is potentially infinite; but beauty is a radiant mass subject to perpetual shrinkage—a floating capital slowly but surely diminishing. Hence it needs some kind of background—something besides itself; else would all the fair-faced Cicelys of the milking-pail and handsome Jennies of the spinning-mill find as many King Cophetuas as there were monied men in the district, and no Nut-brown Maid would go without her earl's son. And a man in possession, with a father squeezed flat under the Stock Exchange screw, is not exactly the best kind of buttress to be imagined, even for such a monument of loveliness as was Estelle Clanricarde.

These thoughts, in other forms of words, possessed Mrs. Clanricarde night and day. The peril of the moment—the fear of still further decline—the fact that no one else was at hand—all made her resolve to bring about this hideous marriage; whereof, however, the present prominent obstacle was Caleb's own unconquerable shyness. Shyness—not disinclination. Mrs. Clanricarde was too astute not to

see the difference. The latter would, perhaps, have daunted even her. The former was no more to be regarded than a child's fear of the dark, to which it was analogous. Of Estelle herself the mother had no grave doubts. For all her suspicions of that underground rivulet of love still flowing between her and Charlie she did not mistrust the weight of her own influence when the time for using it should have come. It was Caleb, not Estelle, that had to be conquered—the man to be encouraged, not the woman to be coerced—which made the whole position more embarrassing, and the tactics to be pursued more difficult. But time and need pressed, and something must be done.

Accordingly, an invitation to dinner was sent to the heir of Redhill; and the extra cost to the housekeeping of a couple of chickens, with the sacrifice of one of those rare old bottles of port bought before the Bears of the House had had a hand in Mr. Clanricarde's affairs, was not grudged by the lady general of the forces. It was the tub to the whale—the sprat to the her-

ring—an investment of greater probable value than those usually made by that unlucky George of hers.

The long summer evening was favourable to confidential talk as well as redolent of love. Mrs. Clanricarde left Estelle in the drawing-room, and proposed a little stroll in the garden with Mr. Stagg. Like the pimpernel before a shower—like birds and beasts before a storm—Caleb, sensitive and double-sensed, knew that a crisis was at hand. Everything showed it. Mrs. Clanricarde's oppressive kindness; her husband's evidently forced attempt to follow suit; Estelle's unconcealed depression—the fear, the scorn, the prayer, the loathing that passed in changing waves of feeling over her face, whence all pity was banished in the passion of her own pain; yes, they stood on the brink of the great Rubicon, and Caleb knew that it would be passed to-night. And how should he bear himself? What should he do? The girl would be offered to him by her mother, and passionately denied by herself; and he would have to choose between saving her position and sacrificing her

person—or respecting her feelings and letting her fortunes be destroyed. He did not think of himself. His sole perplexity was—what was best for her?

The handsome, brisk and hard-pressed lady shut her eyes to all that stood against her. She would not let herself be troubled. Her future son-in-law, when he forgot himself—and he was so preoccupied to-day that he forgot himself very often—ate with his knife, then helped himself to salt on the tip, picked his teeth with his fingers, bit his bread without breaking it, drank with unwiped lips and a full mouth, tossed off his custard like wine, and spooned his cherry tart like so much porridge; then, remembering his offences, he blushed till his sandy hair looked washed with red, and became so confused and humiliated that he did not understand what was said to him, nor could have answered if he had understood.

‘Trifles as light as gossamer webs!’ thought Mrs. Clanricarde. ‘But those solid thousands are facts.’

‘I cannot tell you how glad I am that we

have come to know you better,' she said, when she had him alone and safe in the garden—bending her vivacious black eyes with as much maternal tenderness as she could command on the miserable creature at her side.

'You are very kind, Mrs. Clanricarde,' said Caleb, feeling that he must say something.

'We all have the highest possible esteem and affection for you,' she continued, still maternal and tender.

'I'm not worth it,' stammered Caleb.

She took his hand with a fine impulsiveness.

'Don't say that!' she cried; and her voice was both flattering and deprecatory. 'You are one of the best and dearest young men I have ever known; a man to trust with one's greatest treasure, and to be sure of in every relation of life. I do not know a fault that you have—but one.' Here Caleb opened his round eyes and stared. Out of all the blemishes and faults of which he felt conscious, on which was this glozing tongue about to fasten? 'And that is your modesty,' continued Mrs. Clanricarde. 'You are a great deal too modest, my dear Mr.

Stagg. But let me call you Caleb—such a fine suggestive name it is! You do not hold yourself in as high esteem as you should. You are fit to marry a princess.’

‘Oh, Mrs. Clanricarde!’ put in poor Caleb, his modesty bleeding at every pore.

‘I can read you, you see,’ she continued, her smile as soft as swansdown and her voice as sweet as honey can make even vinegar. ‘You do not think yourself worthy of a grand lady, do you?’

‘No,’ said Caleb in a low voice; ‘I don’t, Mrs. Clanricarde.’

‘And I do,’ she replied, her vivacious black eyes again levelled full on his face.

‘I am not fit to be the husband of a real lady, Mrs. Clanricarde,’ returned Caleb after a pause, speaking with desperate steadiness. ‘I am nought but a miner’s son, and I was nought but a miner myself till I was a grown lad of seventeen. And what’s bred in the bone will out in the flesh, Mrs. Clanricarde; and not all father’s money can make gentlefolks of us, or fit to go shares with the quality.’

Intentionally, Caleb went back on his old habit of speech, which was more purely provincial than it had been of late.

‘You are better than a gentleman,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, with desperate steadiness on her own part. ‘You are a good man, my dear Mr. Caleb.’

‘I am a fool; that’s what I am, Mrs. Clanricarde,’ said Caleb.

‘Why do you say that?’ asked Estelle’s mother, doing battle for him against himself.

‘I ought never to have let myself be persuaded,’ said Caleb. ‘Me and mine are not fit for gentlefolks, and I should have known that, and stuck to the old shop, and not come out of it.’

‘You dear, foolish, modest fellow!’ cried Mrs. Clanricarde. ‘Why, we all love you! You are the delight of the place—for everyone in it knows what a good, honest creature you are. Look at Lady Elizabeth! Anyone would say she was in love with you, for the fuss she makes with you—the affection she has for you,’ she added, correcting herself.

‘Lady Elizabeth is an angel, and pities me,’ said Caleb. ‘She knows me better than any one, and she is sorry for my false position.’

‘False! where is the falseness? Young, rich, clever, good—what does it signify that your father made his own fortune, and that you have not a long line of ancestry behind you? How many of our best men are self-made?’

‘Not quite so near the ground as we,’ said Caleb, still maintaining the self-humiliation which was but another name for desperation.

‘They that humble themselves shall be exalted,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde; ‘and so shall you be, my dear young friend.’

‘Mrs. Clanricarde, ma’am, don’t,’ cried Caleb, feeling like a drowning man with the waters closing over his head.

‘To show you how highly I esteem, and, I may say, love you,’ Mrs. Clanricarde went on to say, ‘and to show you, too, how clearly I have read your secret heart, I am going to be your interpreter to yourself. You love Estelle, and are too bashful to say so. Is it not so? Have I not read your secret, as I say?’

Caleb's face changed to a very piteousness of embarrassment. From red to white, and back again, his staring eyes suffused with tears, his open lips twitching, his hands nervously plucking at the huge chain that crossed his waistcoat—he looked as he felt, as if tortured by a thousand contradictory demons—torn by a thousand different emotions.

Mrs. Clanricarde laid her hand on his arm, and her slight, slim fingers pressed like slender rods of iron into his flesh.

‘Is it not so?’ she repeated.

‘I admire your daughter, Mrs. Clanricarde,’ stammered Caleb in a strange voice.

‘You love her,’ insisted Estelle's mother.

The poor fellow put up his hands before his face.

‘Yes; God help me, I do,’ he sobbed.

His guard was beaten down. He was at his adversary's mercy.

‘Then you shall marry her,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, in tones the cold determination of which no affected tremor could hide—that cold, hard determination, as pitiless as an inquisitor's de-

ere of death, just touched with a certain breadth of triumph which made it rather more diabolical than human.

‘How can I, Mrs. Clanricarde?’ said Caleb, still behind the mask of his freckled hands. ‘She doesn’t value me. She never could love me. How can I wed her against her will, as it would be?’

‘She will learn to love you,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde. ‘You are too good a man not to be loved. She respects you already. That is one step gained. The rest will follow.’

Caleb slowly shook his head. He was just enough master of himself to disbelieve this flattering promise, sweet as it was—responsive to his own ideas as it also was.

‘My dear young man, you do not know a woman,’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, a pitying smile borne like the breath of flowers on her words. ‘We are such creatures of the heart! We are so easily gained by men! Give such a girl as my Estelle, so sweet and gentle as she is, such a husband as yourself, and in a very short time she will learn to prize and adore you. Your

goodness, your patience, your cleverness and knowledge, will all fascinate and win her. I know what I am saying.'

Still Caleb held his hands before his face, and slowly shook his sandy-coloured head from side to side. The rod had not yet budded; the waters imprisoned in the rock had not yet been released. Mrs. Clanricarde was beginning to feel doubtful whether her Waterloo would be won or not. Then she said, fervently:

'Believe me, my dear, I speak as a woman, *avec connaissance de cause*. Once married to you, Estelle will learn to love you, because you will treat her well, and because you love her so fondly. Why, my dear Mr. Caleb, what else makes women love, but because the man loves them! They do not give their hearts unsought—unwooed! Your love for my daughter is the guarantee that she will love you.'

At this Caleb took down his hands and showed his tear-stained face in yet more pitiable plight than before. But into its disorder had flashed a ray of hope and happiness and exaltation so supreme as almost to beautify its homely out-

lines. It was the soul of an angel looking through the eyes of an animal.

Do you really think so, Mrs. Clanricarde?' he said, clasping his hands as in prayer. 'If you thought I could make her happy, and get but so much as a sparrow's meal of love from her, I would let her walk over my body if she'd a mind—I would lie down and die at her feet!'

'What a drivelling idiot!' thought Mrs. Clanricarde, contemptuously.

Nothing in her nature answered to this fervid enthusiasm. Hard, worldly, practical, calculating, life was to her a chess-table, where emotions were good only as they might be used for defence or attack, but where the main object was success. She despised all unworkable and unpractical impulses, and, though she used them to her own advantage—as now—she would rather have dealt with more rational and impersonal arguments. Had Caleb made a business-like bargain with her, offering his money as an equivalent for Estelle's beauty, she would have discussed the terms on the basis of their needs as coolly as she would have bargained for a

carriage-horse or a wheelbarrow. It would have been a train of thought—a genesis of motives—which she would have respected and understood. To meet all this passionate sincerity and humility with sentiments to her as unstable as so many mist-wreaths on the mountain, was fatiguing, embarrassing, and in some sense degrading. Like many clever diplomatists she did not love deceit for its own sake, but would rather meet her adversary and frame her protocol on facts as they were—gaining the victory by dexterous handling and skilful marshalling rather than by deceptions which lessened the value of her own intellect by showing the worthlessness of her opponent's.

‘What a drivelling idiot!’ she thought. ‘Trust me, my dear,’ she said aloud. ‘I pledge you my word, as a woman who knows her own sex and her daughter best of all, Estelle will love you as much as you can desire. It will be your own fault if she does not. And I think we are sure of your part.’

‘God bless you for those comforting words!’ said Caleb, now carried away from his former

moorings as completely as a skiff in a tidal wave. 'If she will have me, she shall never have cause to repent it, so help me God in heaven!'

'Thank you, my son,' said Mrs. Clanricarde.

With again an outburst of fine impulsiveness she kissed the poor omadhaun on his cheek and slightly shuddered as she did so. Then, hastily rising from the seat where they had placed themselves—that seat under the shade of the spreading cedar where Estelle had so often sat and dreamed of Charlie and their unlucky love—she said with well-acted emotion: 'Stay where you are, dear boy, and Estelle shall come to you.'

Her bashful icicle was now thawed. His fancy, hope, love, enthusiasm had swept away his timid self-distrust, and he was where she would have him—where she had taken such infinite pains to carry him. The iron must be struck while it was hot, and Estelle must be amenable to discipline. She had had trouble enough to bend one of the recalcitrants to her will. The other must be made to yield—by force, if necessary.

‘Stay where you are,’ she repeated, the smile on her face like sunshine on a glacier. ‘Estelle will not be long.’

With which she swept away, and Caleb was left to his own reflections, or rather to his mental turmoil, wherein he was conscious of only a many-coloured haze of indefinite joy, like the foam of a fountain where a rainbow quivers.

Was it all true? Would she indeed be now brought to love him as her mother promised? After long years of patient waiting, of loving serving and faithful apprenticeship, would she some day come to him, and of her own free will hold out her hand to him—give him her sweet lips to kiss as one who had the right—offer him the treasures of her love, and say to him: ‘I love you?’ Could it be true? How loyally he would shape his life to earn this great reward! If she would be his, it should be hers to set the lines of their relations. She should be to him as a bird whose broken wing kept her from free flight and chained her captive to the earth—but she should not be caged. She should be as a wandering angel of God, lost for a season from her

home in the distant heaven, but he would not make her bear the burdens of her assumed womanhood, unless for love of him she renounced her higher place and gave herself to him of her own will. Sacred, untouched, revered, he would care for her and surround her with all comfort and protection, but he would never forget the elemental differences between them, nor sacrilegiously step over the gulf that divided them. She should be his queen, not his wife; and to her alone should belong the crown of sovereignty and the sceptre of dominion.

So he dreamed and thought, wrapped in his love like that sleeping babe in his robe of fire, while Mrs. Clanricarde in the drawing-room undertook the subjugation of her daughter, and drew the cords of her maternal authority to the utmost they would bear.

Her task was harder than she had anticipated. Fortified by her love for the one, which gave increased poignancy of disgust for the other, Estelle rebelled and refused, till her mother's patience gave way, and violent words were spoken which terrified the girl to hear while

they lashed to increased fury by their very echo the mother who had said them. Dark threats of public disgrace and eternal separation; of life-long banishment from home and country, and consignment to those French relations who would know how to treat an undutiful daughter as she deserved; passionate reminders of the curse lying on the head of a discarded child, like a crown of thorns ever pressing into the flesh—like a shadow on the path blotting out all sunshine; a sudden return to the pathos of appeal; the picture of father and mother turned into the streets to starve, reduced to a beggary which the sacrifice of her own impossible fancy could avert—all that could most terrify a young girl's imagination and touch a daughter's heart, Mrs. Clanricarde poured forth into Estelle's ears like a boiling flood of mingled blood and tears—a fiery storm of mingled wrath and sorrow.

For some time it was all in vain. Estelle kept the image of her Love before her eyes, and clung to the pedestal whereon he stood. Then, at last, like something that gives way with a

sudden snap, she, as Caleb had done before her, threw down her arms and yielded herself prisoner to the force she could no longer resist.

‘I will do as you wish, mother,’ she said abruptly, standing stiff and rigid as if made of marble. ‘I will go out to Mr. Stagg.’

‘And God will bless you!’ said Mrs. Clanricarde, putting her arms round the slender form that felt as if stricken to stone. ‘God will bless you as your mother does,’ she repeated, trying to draw down the averted head so that she might kiss that clay-cold face.

But Estelle tore herself away.

‘Don’t!’ she said harshly. ‘I cannot bear that, mother! And leave God’s name out of a sacrilege and a sin.’

‘As you will, my poor dear darling!’ said her mother, with a sigh admirably executed, drooping her own head with tender resignation.

So long as she had the main thing secure she cared little for the accessories; and, whether Estelle counted her self-sacrifice as virtue or as sin, made no change in her mother’s mind. As has been said, she was not one to spend time or

strength on sentimentalities which produced nothing. Provided the facts came out right and the sum was duly proved, the rest was mere verbiage. As now, with Caleb's ecstatic love and Estelle's heart-stricken despair.

Then Estelle, her face as pale as the face of a corpse and the feeling of living death in her soul, went slowly over the lawn to the seat under that now desecrated cedar where Caleb Stagg sat—dreaming of the time when he should call her his wife and make her his queen.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE OTHER SIDE.

‘MY mother tells me you want to speak to me, Mr. Stagg,’ said Estelle, as she came up to where Caleb sat, still enveloped in that prismatic haze of hope through which he saw nothing but her possible love and his assured devotion, like flowers seen through the loosened silver of the fountain.

Like a sleeper suddenly awakened from a dream of treasure to the knowledge of loss, her dead white face and stiffened figure, the coldness of her voice and the way in which she stood—her head turned away and her eyes looking into space—all brought Caleb back from hope to fact, from dream to reality, and

made him conscious of his true position. The exaltation of his fancy died down and left his soul like the burnt-out slag of a furnace. He saw it all—as he had seen it before he had suffered himself to be flattered into folly by Mrs. Clanricarde's false words. Put it as he would—be as tender, as devoted as he would—he was but the purchaser and she was the slave—he, the absolute Agamemnon, and she the bound and helpless Iphigenia who had to bleed at the altar under his hand.

As she stood there, so sad and cold and lovely and reluctant—her natural shyness hardened to disdain, and dread of what was to come turning her ordinary fear to wound into the very cruelty of self-defence—a new spirit suddenly seemed to possess Caleb. His painful nervousness passed, his painful awkwardness disappeared. In his very love for her he forgot himself, and the consciousness of his personal shortcomings ceased to trouble him. He could not change his dog-like face, nor the 'wersh' colour of his hair and eyes, nor the ungainly lines described by his gestures, nor the grating

quality of his voice, but the mind and thoughts and spirit behind these unpleasing externals were different from his ordinary presentation ; and purity of motive—the heroism of unselfishness—conquered poverty and ugliness of material, as must needs be when a man is passionate and in earnest.

‘Nay, never look like that, Miss Clanricarde. You must decide this matter for yourself,’ he said gently. ‘I doubt you know what it all means.’

Estelle was silent.

‘Mrs. Clanricarde has told me that you are willing to marry me,’ he continued, his eyes fixed with grave tenderness on the girl’s pallid face.

Estelle shivered through all her body, and her red full lips drew themselves into a close line, like one who prevents a cry of pain.

‘I understand it all,’ then said Caleb, still watching her. ‘Your affairs are in but a poor way, from all I hear, and not likely to get better. Father, he has more money than he can count or knows what to do with ; and, as his only

child, I shall have it all when he and mother go. I should have most of it now if I were to marry; and Mrs. Clanricarde thinks it would be a good thing for the family to get you well settled for gear. And I'm the only big purse-holder here away. So she wants me for you, and you are not willing. That's just the long and short of it all.'

He spoke in a quiet, firm, level tone, very unlike his usual interrupted manner which left on the hearer the impression of physical writhing.

'How can I be willing when I do not love you?' said Estelle hastily. 'What girl wants to marry a man she does not love?'

'And you do not love me, Miss Clanricarde—and never could?' asked Caleb. 'It is idle to ask if you love me now,' he added, with the profoundest sadness in his voice. 'God help me! how could you? But do you think that after years and years of kindness from me—of worship and devotion, and treating you as a queen, and never asking you for nought, you would not give me something of your own free will—do you think that years after now you

could come to have some kind of patience with me—some little kindness for me?’

Even Estelle was touched by the humility and unselfishness of her ungainly lover. Great as was her peril—and Charlie’s—she could not be so inhuman as not to recognize the intrinsic goodness of her assigned executioner, who handled the knife so delicately and was so gentle and tender.

‘I should respect you, Mr. Stagg, and I respect you now,’ she answered in a low voice; ‘but I could never love you—never! never! never!’ she repeated with sudden passion. ‘How could I?’ she added, her eyebrows arched, and her under lip, which ‘a bee had newly stung,’ just a line thrust forward.

‘Nay, indeed, how could you, Miss Clanricarde?’ sighed Caleb. ‘I’m not of the kind for a dainty lady like you to love. I know it only too well, Miss Clanricarde; and small blame to you, I say.’

‘It is not that,’ said soft-hearted Estelle, shamed to compassion by this complete self-surrender. ‘Many girls would love you, Mr.

Stagg, so kind and good as you are—many would. I am sure of that.'

'But not you, Miss Clanricarde?'

'How can I?' she replied, with the desperate calmness of a gambler throwing his last chance. 'I love Mr. Osborne, and only him—and I could never care for any other man in the world. How could I say that I should ever love you?—or anyone, indeed?' she added.

'Ay! is it so?' said Caleb, with a little start. 'I had heard there was a something between you and Mr. Osborne, but I didn't know it had gone that length.'

'We have been engaged since we were boy and girl,' said Estelle; 'and I will never desert him. I will wait for him all my life. If I cannot marry him, I will never marry anyone else, and, if I were dragged into the church, I would say "No" before the altar.'

'And your mother—Mrs. Clanricarde—knows this?' he asked.

'Yes,' said Estelle.

'Then, how could she offer me to marry you, and say that you would consent?' asked Caleb

again, with the honest clown's amaze at refined double-dealing.

'She spoke as she wished,' said Mrs. Clanricarde's daughter, with the finest edge of scorn in her flexible voice. 'My father has lost a quantity of money lately—all our fortune, indeed; Charlie is poor; you are rich; and that is the whole story. You know that yourself. The thing is plain and simple enough.'

'Yes, that is just as I put it,' said Caleb, as quietly as if he were speaking of the most indifferent matter possible, and not of a thing which went with his very life and touched the innermost recesses of his being. But he was anxious to spare her both pain and embarrassment. 'And that brings us round to our starting-point, Miss Clanricarde,' he went on to say, after a moment's pause. 'What is to be done for you, if you will not take me for my money's sake? You are just where you were.'

'They must go into a smaller house, and I must go out as a governess, or something, till Charlie can afford to marry,' said Estelle bravely.

‘There are worse things in the world than either work or poverty,’ she added.

‘Ay, that there are,’ said Caleb a little dreamily. ‘An unloved man is worse.’

‘Yes, a great deal,’ she replied quite simply—to repent of her candour when she saw those poor round, pale eyes grow red with sudden tears.

‘If I could help you in your strait I would, Miss Clanricarde,’ then said Caleb, turning away from the thoughts of his own sorrow to lose himself in her difficulties. ‘But I have no means of my own. Father, he’s a tight hander and does not make me so much as an allowance. He gives me all I want, and pays all I buy without a word, that I will say for him; but he never lets me have more than a couple of pounds in my pocket, and won’t, he says, till I bring home a wife. And then all will be mine, and he’ll keep back only what’ll do for him and mother. So that, you see, Miss Clanricarde, I can do nothing out of myself. I’m like the Irish boggle,’ he added, with a little dash of bitterness in his voice; ‘that leprechaun who went with the estate.’

‘Some one will like to have you with or without your money,’ said Estelle by way of consolation.

She thought of the gardener’s daughter, and of their own pretty, well-mannered parlourmaid.

‘And I should have the same answer to give that you have just given to me,’ returned Caleb, with a quietness that was in itself a reproach. ‘A man’s heart, Miss Clanricarde, can no more be played battledore and shuttlecock with than a woman’s. It stays where it has once been given.’

Estelle gave another shiver.

‘Don’t say that!’ she exclaimed.

So far she was like her mother. She could discuss this matter now on an impersonal and unemotional basis calmly enough; when poor Caleb slipped into sentiment the old revulsion overtook her. And the revulsion was easy enough to see, especially to one enlightened by humility as was this unhappy omadhaun.

‘Well, no, you are right, Miss Clanricarde, that was out of the way,’ he returned; ‘and it’s not me, but you, as we have to think of; and I

can't see my way for you. What will your mother, Mrs. Clanricarde, say to it?' he asked. 'She knew that I was proud to have her promise, and that I was not wanting on my part. What will she say when nothing comes of it?'

Estelle looked scared.

'She will be very angry,' she said, realizing the scene that would have to follow on this consultation.

'With you, Miss Clanricarde?'

'With me.'

'And how will that be for you?' he asked anxiously.

'I shall be very sorry,' answered the girl, still with that shadow of fear over her sweet face. 'But what else can I do, Mr. Stagg? There is Charlie to think of as well as my father and mother. And then there is my promise. How could I ever look at myself in the glass were I to perjure myself, as I should do, if I were to marry anyone else? I cannot do other than I have done. It would be too sinful and shameful if I did.'

‘But it hurts me to think of your being troubled—of your mother, Mrs. Clanricarde, being vexed with you,’ said Caleb, his honest heart in his eyes.

‘I must bear it as patiently as I can,’ answered Estelle; ‘unless——’

She stopped short, then looked at Caleb with a strange suggestive, half-beseeching appeal in her beautiful eyes and quivering lips, which he read but did not understand. She wanted something of him. What was it? The prayer was patent—the words were inaudible. How could he come by their sense?

‘Unless what, Miss Clanricarde?’ he asked. ‘Is it aught I can do for you? Oh, but I would, even to die for you!’ he added, not with a burst of tenderness so much as a solemn kind of declaration—a proffer of service wherein sacrifice would be for healing.

‘It is mean of me to ask it?’ said Estelle hesitatingly. ‘But mother will be so angry with me, and to be angry with you will not matter. But it is so mean and cowardly of me,’ she repeated. ‘Only you are so good!’

‘If I can serve you, I will. I can say no more, Miss Clanricarde,’ said Caleb, his lips, too, twitching nervously.

She called him good!—she whose favour he would have given his life to gain! What, indeed, would he not do to deserve her praise? She could not love him, but he could serve her. He could not rescue her from poverty by the devotion of his whole life, but she said that he could be of use to her. Would he not, then? Ay, gladly, even to the sacrifice of his life, if need be!

‘You can, indeed, help me with my mother,’ said Estelle, a deep blush on her face—a blush of shame for her own cowardice and selfishness. ‘Tell her that it is you who will not marry me, not I who will not marry you—that I am willing, but that you, of your own free will, will not.’

Something passed through Caleb as if he had been struck about the heart. For a moment thought and life and clear perception of things, and even feeling, seemed to fail him, and he was conscious of only a sharp pain and a choking at his throat, so that he could not speak

and could scarcely breathe. This, then, was to be his crowning martyrdom. Of his own free will he was to renounce her—this exquisite treasure of loveliness whom a king might well give his crown to gain. Ah, it was hard! Any trial rather than this, he thought—as we do, when the keen edge of the knife is on our flesh. It was as the offer of food to a starving man, who then is bidden to refuse it, and to go on his weary way, faint with fatigue and chill to the very heart with hunger. It was hard! Oh, dear Lord, but it was a sore trial! He might—and he must not. If he chose to press, she must yield. The mother would make her; and his dream of ultimately winning her might come true. And here was he asked, not only to refuse this proffered joy, but to take on himself an ingratitude that was like to blasphemy.

‘You will—will you not, Mr. Stagg?’ said Estelle’s soft voice, pleading, enticing.

Still Caleb could not speak. His heart was too big; his throat too constricted; his anguish too great. She laid her hand on his, and the touch roused him. He looked at her almost in

bewilderment—first at her, and then at her hand lying on his.

‘It will be the greatest kindness you can do me,’ he heard her say. ‘Take it on yourself. Tell my mother you will not marry me, though I said I would marry you. I do not know what will become of me, if you do not. Perhaps she will turn me out of the house, and curse me. She said she would, before I came out to you. I dare not tell her. But it will all come right, if you give me up of your own accord. Do this, Mr. Stagg. I shall be so grateful to you, and so will Charlie,’ she added, with a girl’s unconsciousness of cruelty to the man who loves her and whom she does not love—for sake of the woman’s fidelity to the man she does love.

On that Caleb found his voice.

‘Never mind him,’ he said hurriedly. ‘I will do for you what will be a shame to me, as a man; but I’ll do it for you,’ he repeated huskily. ‘But it is only for you. And may he you favour reward you as you deserve, and care for you as I would have done.’

‘How good you are!’ said Estelle, beginning to realize the full meaning of the moment. ‘I can never thank you enough, nor repay you.’

‘If thou’rt happy, my bonny lass, that’ll be my meed,’ said Caleb, with infinite tenderness, lapsing into his old forms of speech and accent; the intensity of his feelings causing him to forget his later manners. ‘If I can spare thee pain, what matters what such as I suffer? Thou shalt walk over the body of me, if thou’st a mind.’

He raised his hand—hers still lying on it—till his lips just touched the long white fingers athwart his. With the trembling reverence of a worshipper at a shrine—with the holy tenderness of a mother with her first-born—he just touched, he did not kiss, those precious fingers, white and fragrant as the petals of a lily.

‘God bless thee!’ he then said with a sob that was as the sob of death—that was in very truth the sob of death for him. ‘God bless thee, my queenly lass, and may the Lord abide

with thee always, to thy joy and gladness for ever and ever.'

'Don't, Mr. Stagg,' said Estelle, beginning to weep.

He was no longer the distasteful omadhaun fit only for the laughter of the well-conditioned—the ungainly Beast whom no maiden born of woman could love. He was the hunchback whose wings had unfolded—the prince whose gross disguise was rent and cast away. She could not love him nor marry him, but she could respect and pity him—and she did.

'Now let us go, Miss Clamricarde,' said Caleb, with the same kind of sad firmness he had shown at the first. 'We know what we have to do, both one and t'other, and I think we understand each other. But oh!' he added, with one last return to the old loving, yearning spirit, 'whenever you think of them as loved you best, remember poor Caleb Stagg, the miner lad, who broke his heart to save yours a pang. Ay, my bonny queen, who would have died for you if so be as you would have lived. And greater love hath no man than that he should

give his life for a friend. Now let us get this job over. I shall sleep lighter if I know that I have done your bidding, and pleased you, no matter how.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE POWER OF LOVE.

MRS. CLANRICARDE was ill in bed. That was but natural. Breakfast in bed and a bad headache when things go cross are, to a woman, what a sulky dinner at his club and a bottle of that claret with the yellow seal are to a man. And to weep unavailing tears with one's head buried in a pillow and one's mind possessed by spiteful thoughts, is perhaps, on the whole, a better way of overcoming a trouble than to blot it out with wine-stains, which obliterate everything save the memory of colour, savour and fragrance.

Last night's scene with Caleb Stagg, or rather the disappointment and despair included in it,

had temporarily disabled Estelle's mother. She was like a defeated general, deserted by his friends and in hiding from his foes; and she wanted time to rally those scattered forces which were her schemes, and reform her plan of campaign. Caleb's self-immolation had not done much by way of protection for Estelle; for even he could not pretend that he rejected her for want of his own love for her. Out of very respect for her he was forced to say that he would not accept her sacrifice, though she was willing to make it. He was bound to tell so much of the truth as should both save her dignity and accentuate her unfortunate love for her fascinating Detrimental. Though what was the good of that when circumstance was even harder than Mrs. Clanricarde, and the two young people could not marry, short of qualifying themselves for a lunatic asylum? Still, there was no other way; and as Estelle did not intend to give up her lover, come what might, Caleb's chief duty, as it seemed to him, was to aid her at all costs. And no mother, whatever her desire or whatever her need, can fling her

daughter so persistently at the head of a man who says he will not and cannot marry her, as to argue the merits of the case and discuss his motives like a recipe for frying potatoes.

To a bystander, personally uninterested therefore philosophically tolerant, the irrepressible freedom of thought and the unconquerable nature of love—and the right of each individual to maintain both—are truisms which no one can contravene. You can neither force faith nor disentangle yourself when it holds you; and you have a right to your own belief in all matters not mathematically demonstrated. Also, if you love, you love, and cannot help yourself; and there is an end of the argument. Harry-o'-the-Wynd himself could not separate two hearts which have welded themselves into one substance, like the fused and hammered barrel of a gun; and it would be as reasonable to rail at scarlet-fever as at this overwhelming and omnipotent passion we call Love. But to the family, and those whose own fortunes are implicated in these mental conditions, divergence from the received catechism is a sin, and per-

sistency of love is a crime when the one brings sectarian disesteem and the other matrimonial disadvantage. For the angle makes all the difference; and more than magnets have negative and positive poles.

Hence, though she might be unphilosophic, Mrs. Clanricarde was very human when she had her breakfast in bed; deluged half-a-dozen handkerchiefs with her tears; revolved in her mind countless plans of punishment for Estelle; refused to see her; and for the time thrust her on the outside of her affections, because Charlie Osborne still held the citadel of that obstinate heart, which had not struck its flag nor surrendered as it should when summoned. If she had not loved that horrid young man, thought Mrs. Clanricarde bitterly, she would have accepted Caleb Stagg with no more reluctance than that which so many women have felt and got over in time. It was all this foolish, wicked, undutiful attachment that stood in the way and reduced the miner's money to Rübzahl's dry leaves. And Mrs. Clanricarde thought herself justified in her displeasure that Estelle had not

conquered her rebellious heart and thrown that intruding love once for all into space and the limbo of the past. It was her duty so to do, she argued; and a mother does well to be angry with a daughter who fails in her duty—loves where she ought not and refuses money when she has the offer.

By all of which it came about that Estelle had a morning of full liberty—with Charlie Osborne waiting on chance in the wood hard by.

What is that we love in each other? Who can tell? It is not only beauty. 'There is no such thing as that we beauty call,' but fancy makes all as it lists, and to many unbeautiful creatures is given the most entire and heartwhole devotion. Nor is it necessarily youth—the old thank God for that, when dear eyes shine with the light of love on their faded faces, and those who, had Time ruled their ages straight, would have clasped them in their arms as lovers now lie on their hearts as children. Nor is it even intellect; else would those stupid amiabilities of whom we know so many, go wearily through life, wanting that of which they have so great

abundance now. Nor yet again is it goodness; for many whose souls stand shivering and naked, without so much as a rag of virtue to cover them—many, cruel, vain, selfish, false—receive such passionate incense of love-worship so that no temple of the gods is more fragrant than theirs, and no car of Juggernaut drives over more faithful hearts than those which break at the feet of these smiling demons. We love because we love; and our love is no less strong because its genesis is obscure, and we cannot trace the flood to its source. All we know is the fact of that flood, on the margin of which bloom roses and forget-me-nots—or hemlock and the deadly nightshade.

Tried by certain tests, there was no question of comparative merit between Charlie Osborne and Caleb Stagg. Tried by others, the scale gave another measurement. In person, bearing, charm of manner, delightfulness of acquirements, flexibility of intellect, the penniless young artist—the unemployed Eudemon—stood supreme. For the mere human creature that he was, Venus might have taken him to replace

Adonis, and she would not have found him so reluctant; and Libussa might have well exchanged her sceptre for his love. Had he and Hylas bathed together, the water-nymphs who drown men for their beauty would have chosen him as the fairest; and no Norseman would have mourned Baldur dead while Charlie Osborne had been alive. Everything was in harmony. Person, voice, manner, accomplishments, all balanced and fitted together like the scent, shape, and colour of a flower. The qualities of the root—whether poisonous, nutritious, or useful only to itself—were on another page of the great book altogether. Such as he was to the outer senses, he was worthy of any woman's love; and that he was intrinsically weak, and selfish because weak—unable to rise to the height of any form of heroism because self-indulgent on all sides of life—was one of those things hidden within, like the worm which has reduced the firm white kernel to blackened dust. If Estelle quieted her conscience with the magic words: 'It is for Charlie,' Charlie used the same on his own account. His own needs,

desires and wishes were imperative and beyond all other considerations. And what was vice and what was virtue in another, changed their name and complexion when translated into the language of his thoughts and deeds. There are more kinds of self-made men than one; and their own gods are as many as architects of their own fortunes and builders of their own monuments.

Like a bird running to her nest, Estelle stole quickly up the lane and into the leafy temple, where she knew she should find her shrine already tenanted. And, sure enough, there was Charlie, diligently sketching the forms and leafage of the trees as a kind of excuse to himself, as well as to others who might see him sitting there in that holy place, waiting on chance and Estelle Clanricarde. When he saw her turn that corner and come swiftly up the narrow path, his heart leaped within him, and he sprang forward to meet her with a young lover's fervour and delight. For all the selfish quality of his love it was very real; and perhaps the more imperative because of its selfishness.

‘This is a joy!’ he said, ecstatically, holding her hands in his and looking into her face with those insatiable eyes which no amount of looking satisfies. ‘My sweetest! my darling! how dear of you to come! How have you been able to get away so early?’

‘Mother has a headache and is in bed, so I thought I would not be missed, and that we should be safe,’ said Estelle, laughing for very happiness.

She did not realize her mother’s headache. She thought only of being with Charlie.

‘That is jolly,’ said Charlie, realizing the occasion no more than Estelle. ‘But, my Star, what has happened?’ he asked suddenly. ‘You have something to tell me; I can see you have.’

‘Yes, indeed, I have something very great to tell you,’ answered Estelle; ‘but not just at this moment, Charlie. Let us forget everything but each other for just a minute. Tell me of yourself—how you are; what you have been doing; where you have been; whom you have seen; everything that has happened to you since the

day before yesterday—and then I will tell you my news.’

But Charlie had no great events to tell. He had seen Lady Elizabeth and finished the sketch of the water-mill in the lane leading down to Hindfleet; he had not slept very well last night and he had not eaten much breakfast to-day; he had had a pain in his side and in his right temple, and now he was quite well and as jolly as a sand-boy, seeing that she was here. To which catalogue of insignificant ailments, magnified by love into dangerous symptoms, Estelle listened with a grave face that seemed really sad enough for threatened death, while her eyes grew brighter and larger and more tender than ever with the tears that lay behind them and crept slowly within the lids.

‘Poor darling,’ she said; ‘you want some one to take care of you.’

‘Yes, you,’ said Charlie. ‘I shall never be quite well till I have you as my sweet little wife. That is the only thing I am living for, Estelle. I believe I should die if I lost you.’

‘You shall not do that,’ she answered. ‘Do not be afraid, Charlie. I am yours now and for ever, in life and to death. No one and nothing could part us.’

‘Not even Mr. Caleb Stagg?’ asked Charlie, with a fine disdain that, as things were, looked almost like divination.

‘No, that is all at an end,’ she said simply. ‘That is what I have to tell you, darling. We have had such a scene at home! Such a dreadful time! Mother made that poor fellow propose to me! Just fancy! And I had to refuse him. That is why she has such a headache to-day—poor mother!’

‘Why do you call him poor fellow, Estelle?’ said Charlie, suddenly stiffened and chilled into a very human icicle.

‘Because he behaved so well,’ said Estelle. ‘He was so generous and kind, and did all I wanted him to do so nicely, and bore mother’s anger so bravely for my sake. He did behave well, Charlie.’

‘Don’t, Estelle,’ cried Charlie, rising in wrathful agitation. ‘I cannot bear this. By heavens!’

I will go and insult the fellow. That he should presume—that he should have the insolence to lift his eyes to your face! He deserves a horse-whipping, and I have the best mind in the world to give him one.'

'Charlie dear——' began Estelle.

'Don't!' he said, again interrupting her; 'if you say a word in his favour you will send me mad!'

'Charlie dear!' she remonstrated again.

'Do you think it very pleasant for a man to hear the girl he loves praise and defend another fellow who has had the insolence to make love to her?' cried the angry upholder of love's exclusive privileges. 'I tell you, Estelle, he deserves horsewhipping; and for the turn of a hair I will give him one.'

'Well, I will not say anything if it vexes you,' said Estelle meekly. 'You see, I was bound to tell you the truth, dear, else I would not have spoken of it at all.'

'And you would have kept secrets from me?' he said in an aggrieved voice.

'No. It is because I could not do this that I told you,' was her patient answer.

‘The scoundrel! How dare he!’ fumed Charlie.

She did not speak. She only slid her hand within his arm and gave it a little squeeze with her fingers.

‘Now you are sulky,’ said Charlie, with the injustice of his kind.

‘Indeed, darling, I am not!’ she answered, her sweet eyes full of love and tears.

‘What a brute I am!’ cried her handsome tyrant, suddenly penitent and submissive. ‘Now I have made you cry! What a vile temper I have! I am not worthy of your love, Estelle.’

‘You are worthy of ten times more, if I could possibly feel it! But I cannot,’ said Estelle.

On which he kissed her, and the little skirmish ended in the way in which their little skirmishes—which, by the way, were always on his side—always did end.

Then, having come to his rational and natural senses again, Charlie condescended to hear particulars of the affair; and, when Estelle had told him all, even he was constrained to admit that

the omadhaun had behaved like a gentleman and a man of honour, and that he was not half a bad fellow, after all, and really he, Mr. Charles Osborne, might almost forgive him this involuntary trespass on his own property, so handsomely had it been repented of and atoned for.

Which was just about the way the world goes in its estimate of human action—just about the amount of perception to be found among men and women when they judge of others from the centre of self, and have not so much sympathy as enables them to see into motives and judge of actions by the nobler standard. What had been the highest effort of unselfish love in Caleb was to Charles Osborne a confession of comparative inferiority, which redeemed an act of otherwise gross presumption. And what it had cost, and from what source it had sprung, entered into his calculations no more than the conversion of so much ammonia into corn troubles the participating poppies—nor how much consumption of phosphorus has gone into that thought interests the thinker. The most curious part of selfishness is its absolute unconscious-

ness, so that you might as well try to make a statue aware of its defects as selfishness to recognize itself.

Estelle's thoughts were by no means as definite as this, but she had a dim perception somehow that Charlie had not got quite the right end of things. But she was not one of those steadfast souls which could say, 'a friend of Plato, but the greater friend of truth.' She was the lover of Charlie Osborne, and all the rest might go. She was of the kind of whom most men make their ideal of womanhood. She gave not only herself to love, but also her soul, her principles, her mind. 'He to God and she to God through him,' was her unspoken creed; and her lover was also her master and her priest. Still, she thought Caleb Staggs had behaved better and more nobly than Charlie quite allowed; and if Lady Elizabeth had been there she felt sure that she would have seen things as she did, and would have given fuller credit and richer praise than was included in her darling's half-haughty condescension of acknowledgment.

All this, however, was by-the-by, and need

not trouble her—or him. As things were, the shining hour had to be improved, and let all else be forgotten. The mother's tears; the father's failures; Caleb's love rejected and proffered wealth refused; Charlie's impecuniosity and the hopeless outlook of the future—all were flung into the great river like so much thrashed-out chaff, and only the joy of the moment was retained.

Meanwhile, a princely patron was in course of moulding for Charlie Osborne's benefit; and Anthony Harford was steaming across the Atlantic in the *Greyhound*. The gods were creeping on with their feet of wool, and in a short time would be up with those on whom they were minded to lay their hands of iron. Old Herriek's advice was never more timely than now, and to gather rosebuds while they might, was the young lovers' highest wisdom.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANTICIPATIONS.

IN the lane down the hill, where the worn old water-mill was the picturesque point much affected by artists, lived the Asplines, at their pretty place called Hindfleet. They were not autochthones entitled to wear the golden grasshopper of Kingshouse, but had come here from their own county some twelve years ago—for reasons not difficult to be imagined.

Mrs. Aspline's story was not unique, nor yet was it disgraceful. A buxom cook to a rich old bachelor, she had filled with credit all the offices connected with the tradesmen's books and the kitchen range. In fact, she had filled them with so much credit that in the end she came to

greater security than befalls those rash women who trust to man's momentary weakness and their own abiding influence. Her master married her—as her spotless discretion demanded—and, dying when their little daughter was but five years old, left her as buxom a widow as she had been a cook and a wife, and the assured possessor for her life of his handsome fortune. At her death it passed on to Anne, who was thus an heiress worth any man's looking after.

Besides being a woman of means, Mrs. Aspline was also a woman of strong good sense and of more than average ability. She had less vanity than belongs to her sex in general and to successful roturières in particular, and could appraise things at their true value without adding her own individuality as a makeweight. One fact of modern society especially had she taken to heart—the omnipotence of money. What birth and valour and virtue and learning were in bygone generations your banker's book is now; and, from a childhood passed in the gutter to actions deserving the treadmill, society agrees to cover its eyes with a bandage, provided the

gold of the embroidery is thick enough and heavy enough. This was the main lesson which Mrs. Aspline had learned during her translation from the kitchen to the drawing-room; and she acted on it. She had sense enough never to flaunt her wealth, especially in the faces of those who wanted what she had in such abundance. But she had tact enough to force them all to feel its value by the generous use she made of it, and the freedom with which she gave when help was asked for, or needed without being asked for. She subscribed handsomely to all the local charities and some that were national; but she gave even more in that kind of semi-secrecy wherein the right hand whispers melodiously to the left, and the left lets fall the echoes. The vicar could count on her for a five-pound note whenever he had a mind to save the Sacrament-money; and the doctor had only to tell her of this case of distressing illness and that of ailing poverty, when she would slip a sovereign into his hand, and tout for further help in a way that betrayed her own. She gave liberal wages to her servants and secured their

good word whenever they discussed her with their kind. She kept a generous table and was not lynx-eyed in the matter of remnants and perquisites. Her wine was proverbial in the place, and freely drawn for all comers; her fruits and flowers and choicer vegetables were as freely distributed. She made costly presents once a year when she gave a Christmas-tree; and she made them with a certain deprecating air—a certain apologetic manner—which robbed them of all ‘bounce,’ and placed them in the category of tribute rather than donation. Also she took great pains that they should be perfectly appropriate. Thus she held the recipients on all sides, and won her way up the golden stair with marvellous tact and ability.

Being rubicund and stout, she dressed in the austere dignity of black; which somewhat concealed the exuberance of her lines and toned down the warmth of her carnations. She never committed the mistake of wearing colour, not even in her cap or bonnet; nor in the warmest months of summer allowed herself the betraying ‘liquefaction,’ or vapoury expansion of flimsi-

ness, in material. She had the softest velvets, the richest satins, the thickest silks to be had for love or money ; and she broke up the dead surface with lavish powderings of jet, which still further concealed her outlines and made her inches yet more delusive. In manner she was noticeably friendly ; but a critic might have taken exception to a certain overstrained refinement as too evidently a mask against nature. As hospitable as an Arab whose gourd hangs on the outside of his tent, no mouth came to her amiss ; and, from way-side beggars to Lord Eustace himself, no meal was withheld from those who cared to take their share. Her cook was such as might be expected in the kitchen of an expert ; and the *sans façon* of her hospitality added to its pleasurable conditions, as those conditions gave added zest to her *sans façon*. Thus, thanks to her tact, good sense, discernment of social motives, and strict observance of certain unwritten laws touching the implied subserviency of relative inferiority, Mrs. Aspline, of Hindfleet, had conquered a position in Kingshouse—which else might have held out

against her to the end. And some of the people of the place made it a point of Christian charity to forget the cook they had never known, and to recognize only the widow of a gentleman—the possessor of a handsome fortune and the mother of a desirable heiress.

Others, however, did not; notably Mrs. Clanricarde, who had a daughter to marry and no son for whom to find a wife. Had the sex of her child been reversed, her action would have been reversed too. As things were, Anne Aspline was in her way, not on her side; and the spit was held up as an unconquerable barrier between their houses. The miner's pick did not count.

For herself, Anne was pretty enough to have floated safely on the social wave had there even been no shining sails of gold to carry her forward. She was a fair-haired, gentlemanly girl, who bore no salient marks of her maternal ancestry, save that she had square-topped fingers with broad, flat, opaque, white nails, and that her ears stood out from her head like jug-handles. They were not large nor

fleshy nor badly shaped, but they were distressingly prominent, and, seen from behind, made her small head more animal than human. Save these two sign-manuals, stamped by nature on the living parchment, she had a clear physical pedigree enough; and her inheritance contained more than the mere money which had to come to her on her mother's death. In temperament she was languid; in constitution anæmic. She had an unappeasable appetite for day-dreaming, and she was great in the art of doing nothing. Indolent and unpractical, she never did a hand's turn for herself that she could get anyone else to do for her; and she quite understood the Eastern's contempt for unnecessary physical exertion. She did not so much as put on her own shoes and stockings; had the arrangement of her hair been left to her, she would have cut it as short as a charity schoolboy's; and, had tapes and buttons been her care, she would have bristled all over with pins like a sea-egg. She never worked and rarely played, though she had been taught embroidery by a mistress and the piano by a master. From morning to

night she sat thrown far back in an easy-chair—before the fire in winter, by the open window in summer—reading novels when she was not dozing, and dozing when she was not dreaming. She spent most of her time in devising scenes and situations for herself, where she would have a grand part to play and be the favourite of fortune and the adored of men. Sometimes she went out as an army-hospital nurse, and nursed some young earl from wounds to wedlock—for, indeed, who could resist her, so quaintly beautiful as she would be in her official costume! Sometimes she was the heroine of a shipwreck, when she and the captain were flung ashore together on a desert island in the tropics, where they lived elegantly on fruits and furtive love, on sighs and sunsets and poetry and platonic philandering, at once ardent and respectful. Then she saw herself as the belle of a London season, distinguished by a royal connoisseur, and made the fashion for the meaner fry. How often sleep overtook her as she saw herself mobbed by a frantic crowd of admirers and enviers in the classic regions of Hyde Park, or

followed by a train through the rooms of some palace where she was the cynosure! And sometimes, when her fancy was more modest and her ambition less exalted, she was only found in some interesting position by some delightful stranger—either asleep in the wood, with one arm thrown above her head, or carrying comforts to a sick cottager, or bravely rescuing a child from danger, when, had the thing been real, she would infallibly have shrieked and run away, or collapsed altogether. By which it may be seen that, nice dear girl as she was, our Anne was decidedly a goose, and entirely wanting in that kind of common-sense grip of which her mother had made such good use. Meanwhile, as all her energy exhaled itself in these dreams, and left her nothing for action, the practical upshot was a life of pure indolence and abortive fancy, wherein she did no good to anyone, though also as little harm—and was just a pretty, innocuous, human flower keeping the ground against worts and weeds alike.

Mr. Aspline had had full belief in his wife's integrity and prudence. All the same she was

only a woman, and whether you say with the gallant Francis: '*Souvent femme varie: Bien fol qui s'y fie;*' or in the dalesman's vernacular, '*Women are kittle cattle to shoe ahint,*' it comes to much the same thing. The less power they have the more chance of justice to others; and the more strictly they are held the better in the end for themselves. Hence, although he had left the interest of all he possessed to his widow for her life, he had strictly entailed it on his daughter and her children; so that the one should not be enabled to enrich a second husband beyond her own natural term, and if the other grew up plain or weak-minded it would not be to the advantage of any scoundrel to marry her for the use of her money one week and poison her for full possession the next. If she did not marry and bear children, the money was disposed of in other ways; and to neither woman was left the power of making a will—not even of her savings. For trustees he had left two old friends of his—one a Major Campbell and the other Jack Harford, of Thrift. Major Campbell had renounced trust from the beginning,

and Jack Harford had died ; but his son Anthony, who had been travelling in America—who had, indeed, been living in America for some years—was on his way home to take up his father's affairs, and, among other things, to see about that trusteeship to the Asplines whom he had known when a lad and remembered with pleasure now as a man. 'Cookey,' as the irreverent young scamp used to call Mrs. Aspline, had always been kind and generous to him and his ; and little Anne had been the prettiest and softest and whitest sort of plaything possible—as much like a powder-puff or a poodle-puppy as a little girl in white frocks and multitudinous frills ; good to toss up into the air and catch as she came down, or to carry on his shoulder, while she clutched his short, curled hair and screamed with delight when he kicked like a donkey or pranced like a horse. Perhaps she had been a little too much of a cry-baby for a vigorous young scamp thirteen years her senior ; but, on the whole, he had managed pretty well, and had been able to curb his natural ferocity to quite commendable patience when the wee

waterspout cried for a mere nothing, and squeaked for less than nothing. So that, mingled with regrets for the father whom he had not seen for so many years, and regrets for the friends and intimates he was leaving behind, were pleasanter speculations as to how he should find his old friends 'Cookey' and pretty, wee Anne—now, of course, grown up, and come to the stateliness of Miss Asplinehood.

They, on their side, speculated on the change time must have worked on him, and came to the conclusion that, having been so long in America, he must needs be a perfect barbarian by now—and what a pity it was that an English gentleman should so spoil and lower himself!

'I hope he will not think it necessary to come here,' said Mrs. Aspline, looking round her pretty drawing-room with its ship-load of furniture and ornaments. 'I would so much rather transact my business with him by letter or at the lawyer's; for, of course, he will have that horrid habit of chewing tobacco and of spitting all over the place; and that will be too disgusting, you know.'

‘Detestable!’ said Anne.

‘I wonder if he has been living much with the Indians?’ then said Mrs. Aspline. ‘Perhaps he is married to a squaw in beads and a blanket. One never knows what these wild young men are up to when they are once out of one’s sight.’

‘No,’ said Anne, visions of Lara and the Corsair making a hotch-potch of ideas with Prince Florizel and the Reverend John Creedy. ‘It is dreadful to think of,’ she added, with a little shudder.

‘And if he brings his wife home with him, and she carries her babies in a basket at her back, how very painful it will all be!’ continued Mrs. Aspline, who was fond of reading books of travel.

‘I wonder Mr. Harford let him stay away so long,’ said Anne, who was the freest if the most indolent She alive. Mrs. Aspline did not give her even advice, still less did she attempt discipline or coercion—which, by the way, was not needed. Her languid independence naturally inclined the fair-haired dreamer to the

strictest kind of rule for others. 'If the first Mrs. Harford had lived, it would have been different. She would have brought him home long ago,' she added.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Aspline; 'a mother has more power in a family than any father can have. Better lose a dozen fathers than one mother; for even the best men are but poor creatures in a house compared to women.'

She spoke with that curious conviction of superiority by the grace of sex characteristic of the women of to-day. She had been made by her husband, but she believed that she had been the sole architect of her fortunes, while her master and his thousands had been but the hodman with his bricks.

'Yes,' said Anne, who would have said 'yes' to just the contrary proposition.

'It was the saddest pity when the first poor Mrs. Harford died!' said Mrs. Aspline. 'If she had lived, she would not have let Conny marry that old major of hers'—a man just fifteen years older than his wife, and making the best husband to be found within the four seas—'and, if

she had lived, this young Anthony would have been kept from ruin. The second wife was a poor creature, and cared only for her own.'

'By-the-by, Anthony is not so very young, mother,' said Anne. 'He is thirteen years older than I am.'

'And you are over twenty?' asked her mother.

'Yes, last February; so that he is thirty-three.'

'Old enough at all events to know better,' said Mrs. Aspline.

'He may not be quite so bad as we think,' said Anne, as a reflection rather than a remonstrance. 'You see, we do not know anything against him, do we, mother? And he may not have been living with the Indians. All Americans do not.'

'He cannot be worth much to have kept away in a half-civilized place like that for all these years,' said Mrs. Aspline, a little severely. 'You know they are not like us, Anne. They are not gentlefolks, like the English.'

‘No, I know,’ said Anne. ‘But perhaps he has not forgotten all his English ways. He may not be so bad as the rest.’

‘Well, as you say, he may not,’ returned her mother, making the most of a concession which she conscientiously could. ‘But I have always my doubts of young men who prefer foreign parts to home; and I have seen something of life by now.’

‘Yes,’ said Anne, with her customary air of non-combative submission, by which she never fought over differences of opinion, but always kept her own.

This quiet tenacity was the form which her mother’s shrewd resoluteness of aim had taken in her. It was the same with a difference, like the ‘alternate generations’ of a Medusa or the tadpole which precedes the frog.

‘I only hope he will make a good man of business if he decides on continuing my trustee,’ said her mother. ‘If not I shall appoint another.’

‘Why not at first?’ asked Anne.

‘Well, no; I should scarcely like to do that

without giving him a chance,' replied Mrs. Aspline. 'You see, Jack Harford was poor Mr. Aspline's best friend, and I would not like to throw a slight on his son all at once and without good grounds.'

'No,' said Anne; 'that would not be fair.'

And here the conversation came to a sudden standstill by the prosaic interruption of luncheon. Afterwards, when Anne's customary siesta was over, the carriage, with its showy bays, and a drive through the village and so on to the moor, gave a new turn to their thoughts, and the ladies ceased to discuss Anthony Harford and his hypothetical misdemeanours. They turned instead to what was on Mrs. Aspline's part a rather acrimonious commentary on Lady Elizabeth's extraordinary craze for that dreadful lout, that Caleb Stagg. For the two were to be seen at some little distance off the main road, she on horseback and he walking by her side, evidently in earnest conversation together.

'I consider it downright indecent,' said Mrs. Aspline a little hotly. 'Such as Caleb

Stagg is no fit companion for an earl's daughter, put it how you will ; and Lady Elizabeth, good creature as she is, lets herself down too much.'

'She has not quite enough pride,' said Anne, who, for all her social admiration of Lady Elizabeth, thought, with her mother—she had a great deal too much condescension when it came to consorting with miners' sons.

'If the creature was tolerably well educated I'd not be the one to say no,' said Mrs. Aspline. 'But such a thing as he is, I would not take him to clean the boots and knives in my house ! And here is an earl's daughter as thick as thieves with him ! And his father only a miner, and his mother a pit-brow lass.'

'He is not fit company for her,' said Anne. 'It is far better when people stay in their own class.'

'Far,' said her mother. Then she 'remembered herself,' as she would have phrased it, and her peony-like cheeks grew a yet livelier red. 'Now there is myself,' she went on to say, answering her own thought ; 'I was a poor

officer's daughter'—he had been a colour-sergeant; but let that pass—'so, of course, I was a lady. But when poor papa died I had to go out and get my own living, as we all had. I was lady-housekeeper till your father took a fancy to me and married me.'—Oh, cookey! cookey! Thou who dished up those nice little dinners which warmed the cockles of Mr. Aspline's heart, so that he made the concoctor thereof his lawful wife!—'But even I hold myself not quite equal to the rest, because I had to work for my living. And that is always against a lady.'

'It should not be,' put in Anne, with dutiful care.

'It is though,' said her mother. 'But, Lord alive, if I am not quite the tip-top thing, what is this trash?' she exclaimed with real passion.

'No; what, indeed?' said Anne.

'And consorting there with Lady Elizabeth as if he was her lapdog,' cried Mrs. Aspline.

'It is a pity,' said Anne.

And then she blushed a little ruefully, and wished that her mother had not spoken quite so

vehemently, for Lady Elizabeth was so good—
and, being an earl's daughter, she was justified
in any eccentricity it pleased her to commit.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ANGEL OF HEALING.

LADY ELIZABETH had been from home, and it was during her absence that the sorry chapter of history already recorded had been transacted between Caleb and Estelle. Had she been at home to check and advise, she might have saved her poor, ungainly friend the pain which attends unfruitful effort. She would have shown him the insecurity of Mrs. Clanricarde's method, the selfishness of her desires, and the impracticability of his own dreams. For how could any good girl, pledged to one beloved, marry another even for the sake of her family and his money? The instinct which denies the body where the love is not—which forbids

that 'lips should meet over a gulf so wide as separates heart from heart,' is the wholesome one—though it may sometimes topple over on to the other side and find justification by its own excess in what the law refuses for the first part and punishes for the second. And Estelle had been right, not only in view of her own purity but for Caleb's future happiness, when she virtually refused to marry him, though that refusal had taken the form of an appeal to his generosity—making his very love consent to his renunciation.

All this Lady Elizabeth had thought, and some of it she had said this very morning when she had been over to see Estelle, and had learned from her the whole story as it stood. Sorry as she was for the pain that had flowed like a river of bitterness among them all, she would not condemn—not even poor, distracted, worldly-minded Mrs. Clanricarde, who honestly held the arrangement of her daughter's rich marriage as a mother's most pressing duty. She had acted only according to her lights when she had offered

Estelle to Caleb Stagg. In her mind his fortune redeemed his person, and his wealth condoned all offences against manner; and Estelle would do far better to marry Caliban with a gold-mine on Mount Setebos than the shipwrecked Ferdinand who had lost his coronet among the rocks. And Lady Elizabeth had mastered that most difficult rule of all in the philosophy of charity—that of judging of a person from his own standpoint, and looking at life through his windows.

Thinking all these things, and full of care and perplexity for those she loved, whose sorrows she had made her own, Lady Elizabeth had turned her horse's head towards the moor, and was cantering briskly over its breezy breadth, when she saw poor Caleb moving mournfully among the gorse and heather, thinking he was looking for plants and creatures, as was his wont, but not seeing even the broad-leaved sun-dew at his feet—nor conscious that the lark was singing overhead—nor that the sun was shining down on the earth like that song translated into glory. He was conscious

of nothing that was about him. He was thinking only of Estelle; of the difficulties of her position with her mother; of their pecuniary entanglements; of the hopelessness of her love for Charlie Osborne, and his own inability to help her—always with that dull pain at his heart, like some physical smart for which is no anodyne known of man.

When Lady Elizabeth saw him, she rode on to the moor and came up to him. Even at the distance at which he was she could see something of his grief. That unlovely face was a mirror, blurred and distorted by inferior workmanship, but expressive; and the kindly heart of the earl's daughter, who cared for humanity more than for art, and believed in sympathy rather than in æstheticism, was moved to more than ordinary compassion—to the desire to relieve and the wish to share.

At the same time, it is only just to say that, with all her deep insight into essential qualities, the woman in her understood and sympathized with Estelle's physical repulsion for the man; and, with all her theoretic and practical demo-

cracy, had Caleb Stagg, the miner's son, made love to her as her equal, she would have withered him into a heap of dead ashes by the lightning of her scorn, and would herself have recognized more clearly than she did now the difference between condescension and amalgamation. As things were, she had no need to draw these finer lines. His human love had gone to Estelle; to her was given that pure worship which honours the heart that holds it even more than the feet at which it is offered.

Caleb, mooning along, his eyes on the ground, seeing nothing of all they looked on, did not hear the tread of the horse, softened as it was by the moss and heather; and not until Lady Elizabeth was by his side, and had called him by his name, did he know that she was near him. He started when she drew up, leaning from her saddle and offering him her hand—her beautiful face a little flushed with her ride—her large grey eyes sweet and mild and full of kindness—her tall, slim figure, at once so graceful and so dignified, looking, as it always did, at its best in her riding-habit—and in her whole atti-

tude and over her whole person that nameless charm of mingled tenderness and nobility, lovingness and dignity, which made her appear to some like a maiden queen and to others like a mother-angel.

‘Lady Elizabeth! Ah! but I am main glad to see you!’ cried Caleb with simple fervour, provincial as he always was when deeply moved or taken unawares. He was like some stiff-screwed telescope that wanted a little time and management before it could be properly adjusted.

‘I recognized you from the road, and came across to speak to you,’ said the lady.

‘Thank you, Lady Elizabeth,’ he answered. ‘That was kind of you. But then you always are kind, Lady Elizabeth.’

‘Not more so than others,’ she said, with a smile.

‘*I* think so,’ he returned, with that humble kind of gratitude which means so much suffering and pain. ‘There is only one Lady Elizabeth Inchbold in the world,’ he added simply.

‘Have you learned to flatter during my absence?’ she asked, trying to speak lightly.

‘Nay,’ he answered very sadly, looking into the distance in that far-off way which shows a mastery of preoccupation the very reverse of flattering. ‘I have learned nothing so pleasant, Lady Elizabeth. I have learned only pain since you left.’

‘I am sorry for that,’ she returned, knowing well what he meant.

But, among other sweet traits of good breeding, she had that of never forestalling a confession nor checking an anecdote by saying that she already knew what was coming.

‘I have missed you, Lady Elizabeth,’ he then said, looking into her face. ‘When you go away it is as if you somehow took my guardian angel along with you. Things go all to wrongs with me, and I feel as if I had lost my compass to steer by.’

‘Have they been going wrong?’ she asked. ‘I am sorry to hear that.’

‘Ay, that they have!’ he answered. ‘I am not one to cry out if my finger aches, and I

think that the most of us get in the world much as we deserve ; but sometimes life is hard, and one scarce knows which road to take. All seem to lead to muck and mire alike !

The round, red-lidded eyes filled up with tears, and the loose, clumsy mouth quivered. Men, who can bear torture without a groan, break down in the presence of a loving-natured woman who feels for them, and whom they can trust.

‘For the moment only,’ said Lady Elizabeth softly. ‘The darkest cloud, you know, has its silver lining. Surely no symbol was truer !’

‘So they say, and may be it is true ; but to be offered a crown that will not fit, and to hold in your hand a dove that will not bide—to have a palace for your soul that is nought but a cloud and that fades away as you look—it’s long looking for the silver lining there !’ he said, a little passionately and more despairingly. ‘And that’s what has come to me, Lady Elizabeth, since you left your home !’

‘I am grieved it has all happened so,’ she said. ‘I was afraid it would, from what she

told me, and from what I saw the mother wished. And I knew she would not consent. How could she? Ask yourself, Mr. Stagg, how could she?’

‘Nay, as you say, Lady Elizabeth, how could she!’ he repeated, the ellipsis fully intelligible to each. ‘She had no choice but to say me nay; and I was a fool for letting myself dream of aught different.’

‘If you had thought—if you had reflected—’ said the lady gently.

‘Yes, yes, I know,’ he answered humbly. ‘But, believe me, Lady Elizabeth, I would not have given in—for I know her value and myself too well—but that I was so sore tempted. It was all right, they said as ought to have known; and I had only to be patient and hopeful for just the first, and then all things would right themselves. But it was a false promise; and when she came out, so white and pitiful, I learned the truth I ought never to have let slip.’

‘You must forgive even her who caused you all this needless pain,’ said Lady Elizabeth

gently. 'Poor woman! She is just distracted with anxiety, and does not know which way to turn. And she might have deceived herself. Her very desire that this thing should come to pass might have made her believe it possible. Our own hopes and wishes do deceive us so much!'

'But she could only desire it for the sake of father's money,' said Caleb without bitterness or excitement, simply stating a fact. 'I knew it all along; but I hoped, as fools will.'

'They are in great straits,' said Lady Elizabeth. 'Mr. Clanricarde has made an unlucky speculation and lost almost all they had.'

'And I have nothing of my own,' said Caleb; 'and not a trade at my fingers' ends to make anything by. If I had thousands, I would give her to the last farthing, and be proud that I had been able to help her.'

'I am sure of that,' said Lady Elizabeth, looking at him with eyes as soft as a dove's, for surely a fairer soul than this of the ungainly omadhaun's were never lodged in human body; and friendship does not demand beauty of per-

son nor grace of manner, as does love. It demands mainly goodness and the assurance of stability; and of these Caleb had large possession. 'And, indeed,' she added, still those soft, dove-like eyes on his, 'the only way in which we can forget our own pain is by sympathy with others—losing self in unselfishness.'

'Yes,' said Caleb.

'And we are only good according to our trials,' she continued. 'It is easy to be generous and unselfish, and all that, if we are not put to the test. When we are, how we bear ourselves decides our worth.'

'Yes,' said Caleb again.

'And nursing unavailing sorrow is but a poor way,' she said, still so gentle but so direct.

'That is it,' he sighed.

'And jealousy is even a worse,' she said.

'Ay, that is it!' was his reply.

Then there was a short pause between them, when Lady Elizabeth said, rather suddenly:

'Of course the best thing would be if Mr. Osborne could marry as soon as possible, and so, at least, save Estelle.'

Caleb blenched just a trifle. It might have been that a gadfly had stung him or a cockchafer had struck him. It was no more than just the sudden curve of a surprise.

‘Yes,’ he said, a little huskily.

But he cleared his throat as one who wished to make his voice resonant.

‘I do not see how that can be, however,’ the lady continued; ‘for he does not make money. He does not sell his pictures well, and those are the best things he does. Somehow, he has either not struck the right vein or he has exceptionally ill luck, for his pictures are badly hung when they are accepted and seldom or never sold. I am always hoping his luck will turn, for he is really very clever and his work is above the average.’

‘I am no judge, Lady Elizabeth,’ said Caleb, still husky in spite of his efforts, and finding speech difficult.

‘No,’ she answered; ‘perhaps not; but, take it from me, they deserve more recognition than they get. They are really very good—though, of course, they are not of extreme merit like

any of the masters. However, I hope I have done him some good. A very rich man I met with when I was in London—a Mr. Smythe Smith—is going to have his new house in Piccadilly painted in the modern style of continuous decoration’—Caleb made his round eyes rounder than ever—‘that is, the rooms are to be painted, some with birds and some with flowers and some with figures and landscapes and things like that—the walls, you know; not papered, but painted like pictures.’ (‘Oh!’ said Caleb.) ‘And I recommended him to employ Charlie Osborne. It would be a costly matter, and Charlie would make a very good thing by it, and perhaps that would be a nest-egg for his marriage.’

‘That was kind,’ said Caleb, turning away his head. There are times when the soul would fain hide itself even from its guardian angel!

‘But I do not know when Mr. Smythe Smith’s house will be ready for decoration,’ continued Lady Elizabeth; ‘meantime, something ought to be done.’

‘Yes,’ said Caleb.

A sudden thought seemed to strike his friend. She looked at the homely face before her, still a little averted—looked, as if measuring something in her own mind.

So she was. She was measuring the extent of Caleb Stagg’s unselfishness and nobleness. Then she spoke.

‘I wonder if your father would like such a room at Redhill?’ she said. ‘Does he care for modern fashions? Would he care for a decorated room in the new style?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Caleb, after a pause. ‘He might.’

He could scarcely speak, and his face was ashy pale.

‘And you?’ said Lady Elizabeth. ‘You would not oppose it if your father liked the idea?’

Over that pale face passed a spasm of acute pain. Then a sudden rush of blood made the rose in Lady Elizabeth’s breast pale by contrast.

‘No,’ he said firmly. ‘I would try to per-

suade father to have it. It would be to her good !'

'God bless you ! God bless you !' said Lady Elizabeth fervently, laying her hand on Caleb's shoulder and looking in his face with eyes that were as a caress on his. 'You are as I thought you were, Mr. Stagg—a true, good, noble-hearted man—and one of whose friendship I am proud.'

'Do not say that, Lady Elizabeth,' he answered humbly. 'What else could I do when I love her and she is not for me ?'

It was just at this juncture that Mrs. Aspline saw these two apparently mismatched associates, and pronounced with so much asperity on their friendship. That is the way in which the world always judges things unknown; and to condemn does raise one so many inches higher in one's own estimation and so pleasantly smoothes down the Pharisaical silk within us !

Soon after this, Lady Elizabeth rode off to the Dower House, where she ought to have been an hour ago; and Caleb trudged back over the

moor and on to Redhill, where he was eager to fasten the knot his good resolve had tied. His heart felt lighter, and life had a brighter outlook than an hour ago, and nature had once more her echo in his soul. He heard the birds in the bushes, and he noted how the butterflies circled in the air. His eye took in all the flowers and plants at his feet—all the lovely cloudlets in the sky—and his ear noted each cry and note of the hidden creatures. He would not think of himself. He would not see that he was helping his rival to his happiness at his own cost. He resolutely fixed his mind on Estelle and her joy; and more than once he had to clear his eyes of their gathering mists when he pictured her sweet face smiling into his and her soft hands held out to him as she thanked him for his help.

‘And maybe then she will give a warm thought and take me into her heart,’ he mused. ‘God bless her! the Lord love her! ay, at any cost to myself.’

‘And God bless that good honest fellow!’ said Lady Elizabeth half-aloud, as she rode

along the lanes and thought of that unlovely
omadhaun as the hero he was, and saw how
shapely was the spirit which inhabited so un-
gainly a form.

CHAPTER XV.

PROFFERED MANNA.

LADY ELIZABETH's scheme of finding work for Charlie Osborne, by painting the walls of the great drawing-room at Redhill, was hugely approved of by Miles Stagg when the thing was proposed by Caleb, who half doubted his father's consent.

‘Nay, I care naught for fashion,’ he said with his big fat laugh, when Caleb shot his first bolt from behind the shelter of his stalking-horse. ‘I’m not much of a fashionable man myself; but what her ladyship says is right, that is right to me; and what she says ought to be done, that has to be done where I’m captain of the gang, or I’ll know the reason why. If she likes to

have the walls all a-painted with dicky-birds and turnip-tops, it's all one to me so long as she is suited. It's for her eyes in the long run, not mine, I reckon; and the long run has most claim.'

Then he chuckled and grew red in the face for joy of his dancing, light-limbed thoughts; and Caleb grew redder still for shame of his and them. But of what use to remonstrate with density interpenetrated with obstinacy? To let it stumble forward in its own way and to go on our own path unheeding, is the only wise course when we do not wish to spend time and strength on futilities. Granite is no more to be patted into a new form than a dense-witted, obstinate person is to be stirred by reason or demonstration. So Caleb knew, and on that line he lived. His father had made up his mind that Lady Elizabeth Inchbold was to be his daughter-in-law. She was not only his Abracadabra, and the Name of Power to which he yielded instant submission, but she was his Hope fulfilled, his Ambition impersonated; and no besom ever wielded by truth and impossi-

bility together could sweep him out of the fool's paradise where he had niched himself so securely. That she should have proposed this thing was but another proof where so many had already accumulated. What to her were the walls of the great drawing-room at Redhill unless she had it in view to spend her life in looking at them? Had Caleb told him the truth, he would not have believed it for the first part; and, if he had, then would he have refused his consent for the second. He would give his money for her ladyship's own pleasure, but for the sake of her friends, nay, he would be hanged first.

The father consented with his broad Pantagruelistic humour; but the mother opposed a feeble, fatuous negative. This notable scheme of wall-decoration did not smile at her. She was sure she did not know how all the furniture and things were to be moved, she said in her weak-knee'd, lachrymose way. She hadn't so much strength in her arms and back as she used to have, and she would be sorry to see good things like theirs spoilt with mishandling.

And she thought the walls did well enough with the paper that was on them, now that it was there. It had cost a powerful sight of money when it was first put up, and it was as good as new—for they never used the big drawing-room, except sometimes on a Sunday to give it an airing, or when they wanted a fire in to keep the damp out. And, though she didn't quite like that girl and bairn, the rest of the paper was gradely pretty. Them roses and poppies were like life ; and she was never tired of them blue-bottles, just like what she had picked so many a time in the corn-fields when a lass ; and it was a pity, that it was, to strip it from the walls for a new fad that, maybe, wouldn't look so well as it when all was said and done.

So she objected in her maundering, monotonous way, till Miles came down on her with a heavy back-hander : after which, poor soul, she subsided into sniffles and silence on the sofa, and the voice of her complaining was heard no more in the land.

Her opposition had, however, its customary effect of strengthening Miles in his resolve. He

had not taken a bankrupt mine in faith on his broad shoulders and made his fortune in consequence, to be crossed by his own wife. Let her mind her own business and he would mind his, he said; and if he chose to give her the finest drawing-room in the county, that was his doing, not hers. All that she had to do was to take what was given her and make no bones about it; else he'd soon let her see who was master; and now she knew!

These scenes were too frequent to cause much commotion when they occurred. Nancy was one of those women who are easily subdued, but can never be taught. Her man was her master, and she knew it—had always had to recognize it—had lived for the last six-and-twenty years under his rule, and for all that time had not been allowed to call her soul her own. And yet she could not give spontaneous submission. She had to be dinged and donged into obedience, according to her husband's phraseology. She had not strength nor sense enough to yield of her own free will and before that inevitable scene of brutality and pitiful

tears had taken place. But then, if she had had strength and sense enough for that voluntary bending to tyrannous power, she would have been probably able to circumvent what she could not avoid, and to slip from under what she could not bend.

In this case, then, as in every other, neither her fatuous objections nor her silent sniffles on the sofa moved the rampant will of her iron-fisted husband any more than the whip of the rain on the glass; and Caleb was ordered to write now at once to Mr. Charles Osborne to offer him the job at his own valuation. Miles did not care what it cost; and it might go into the hundreds or into the thousands for what he had a mind. In truth, secretly he was glad of the opportunity for spending. These lily-livered donnerts of his—this wife and son who were not worth their meat—never wanted naught, as he used to complain to Jim Fisher; and what was the use of a pot of money if it was to lie buried in the croft, as one might say, and not a body of them all to see the colour of the gold or to profit by it, though it were never so little!

Wherefore, let the great drawing-room, which was still spick-and-span new, be redecorated according to Caleb's wish, young Mr. Osborne's fancy, and Lady Elizabeth's desire. And Jim's sententious : ' I'll see ye in t' union yet, Miles,' went for nothing, if not for an extra puff of wind to the already well-filled sails.

It was a difficult letter for Caleb to write. Looked at in any light he would, it was a main sore task. He was not fond of writing letters at any time—no man with his up-bringing is—but to write to Charlie Osborne, who held himself as high as Lord Royne or the earl himself, who loved that beautiful star of his life and light of his dreams, and who was in turn loved by her—to write to him, offering what Miles called this job that he might be well paid, and so brought nearer to the goal of his desire—yes, in all ways it was a difficult thing to do for one so painfully conscious as Caleb Stagg. The sheets of good note-paper he spoiled by unfit beginnings, uncomfortable endings and imperfect middles, would have made poor Nancy's grizzled hair stand on end in horror at the waste,

had she seen it. At last, however, the tortured scribe got the thing done; and, after all his false starts, wrote what he might have written at the outset—a simple, plain, unaffected proposal, based on Lady Elizabeth's recommendation.

When he received this letter, Charlie Osborne exploded first into laughter and then into wrath. The gentleman in him revolted at the thought of working for Miles Stagg's pleasure; and his pride took fire when he realized the indignity of taking money from such a brute. He, Charlie Osborne, to be indebted to a coarse, rude miner for the means of living—to be paid by him as he, the miner, had once been paid by his employers—he a gentleman and his employer a boor of the lowest kind! He got up and looked at himself in the glass, pulling down his coat-skirt and settling his collar and cravat. It was a curiously instinctive movement—the half-unconscious expression of his very conscious pride—for few families of long descent are more conscious of superiority of condition than are the sons and daughters of the country clergy.

Their place is one of moral influence ; they have direct authority in schools and choirs, and in other matters as well ; their example is noteworthy, and they are under the same inducement to behave well as are the confessedly aristocratic—the father's office standing for family traditions. To the poor, with whom their business chiefly lies, they are as noble as the noblest ; and as all things in life are relative—social superiority among the rest—the clergyman's son and the belted knight stand equally high in their several places—which is all that is wanted to ensure the feeling of relative equality.

Hence Charlie Osborne, though only a poor artist who must work to live, as the son of a gentleman and himself a gentleman held himself in his right to break into sardonic laughter passing on to wrath, when he received Caleb's letter and realized its conditions.

To work for those mere brutes ! To put his delicate thoughts and subtle fancies into a house tenanted by creatures with no more perception of art and beauty than so many human pigs littered in a golden sty ! No, he could not, and

he would not. He was an artist, not a tradesman nor a hodman; and he could not degrade himself to work for those whose eyes, unpurged of their grossness—eyes which no euphrasy of refinement had ever touched—would not understand the essential meaning of what they saw. Put out of court the fact that the younger scoundrel (all undesirable men are scoundrels to gentlemen in a rage) had dared to raise his insolence so high as to Estelle: he had perhaps atoned for his insult in the best way he could; and perhaps Mrs. Clanricarde had been more to blame than he—she must have been, indeed, by what Estelle had said—well, let that all pass, though it was difficult to forget it, and almost beyond his power to forgive; yet, going back on the mere crass stupidity and ignorance of the creatures themselves, he could not do it—he would not—sorely as he needed funds at this moment, and dark as was his horizon.

Tempest-tossed, revolted, passionate, inflamed, he debated within himself all that evening, and carried the thought like a fire in his brain through all the night; and in the morning he

had come to no definite decision, no absolute assertion of yea or nay. He, too, wrote and destroyed half-a-dozen letters, some accepting, some refusing; and then he suddenly decided on going in person to Redhill. He should be better able to judge when he had seen the place; and if there were capabilities perhaps it was his duty to utilize them. One never knows where one may do good; and he should be sorry if he had neglected an opportunity for spreading the religion of true taste. Whereat, warmed by this sudden outblaze of artistic philanthropy, Charlie took his hat and sketching-book and walked off to Redhill to interview his would-be patrons.

When he came to the house and was ushered into the great drawing-room his heart sank and his disgust swelled. It was revolting to see this mingled mass of magnificence and hideousness—pitiable to note the inharmoniousness, the incongruity, everywhere alike. Over the house and the inmates, and in every fact and circumstance, reigned the same barbarous confusion and inartistic misfit—the same crying want of taste and almost profligate expenditure. How

could he throw his soul on such a rag-heap? Fancy—painting a frieze of stately peacocks for people who could have lived with this gaudy wall-paper of execrable design, where a simpering sylph, with mauve-coloured flesh, ogled a lumpish Cupid, all knobs as if made out of apples—sylph and Cupid repeated a dozen times in a couple of breadths, with the same eternal bouquet and sprawling garland of red and blue and yellow flowers, bright enough to give a sensitive brain inflammation on the spot! What would such people think of a dead-gold ground behind delicate trceries of maidenhair ferns, where not two fronds were alike? What would they say to a dado of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ‘*pietre dure*’ in arabesques and stiff, conventionalized, geometrical forms? It would be emphatically casting pearls before swine, thought Charlie Osborne, who appraised his own art as the highest outcome of human intellect, and himself as by no means the wooden spoon among the candidates for honours.

And he was thinking this when the door burst open with a rude kind of bang, and Miles Stagg,

with Caleb and Nancy at his heels, came noisily into the room.

‘Well, Mr. Osborne, sir, so you’re taking stock, are ye?’ shouted Miles, in that way he had as if speaking to a deaf world.

‘I was looking at your room,’ returned Charlie, glacially polite.

‘It’s Lady Elizabeth’s whim,’ laughed Miles, showing all his teeth; ‘and we’re bound to follow my lady’s lead, ain’t we, Caleb, lad?’ slapping his son’s shoulder.

‘I’d like to do as Lady Elizabeth wishes,’ said Caleb, stiffly, meaning rebuke; and Charlie, who was what the Scotch call ‘gleg at the uptak,’ wondered what the deuce was underneath this odd jocularly and constrained reply. But not the wildest of the speculations which shot like ‘northern streamers’ through his brain came near the presumptuous truth, as Miles Staggs had conceived it and as Caleb repudiated.

‘Well,’ said Miles after a pause, ‘and what may you be thinking of the job, Mr. Osborne? Cost’s no question.’ He visibly swelled with pride as he said this, his thumbs in his waist-

coat pockets and his big coarse fingers playing a jubilant tattoo on the flaring flowers of the embroidered satin. 'I've enough and to spare for my lady's fancies and thy work, my lad'—here he lapsed into his ordinary familiarity of tone—'and thou'lt not put a wrong price, were it ever so.'

Charlie's handsome face flushed; his small, cleanly-moulded head and finely-cut features wore the air and look of royal disdain. The money was a temptation, as he had before admitted, but gained at such a price—by association with such dreadful creatures—by work on such a really 'awful' house—it would be too dearly bought. He was not of the kind to see the fun of the position nor to make capital out of its humour. He was only disgusted with its vulgarity; and he scarcely cared to conceal what he felt.

'I fear that to begin at all in the room will entail too many alterations,' he said coldly. 'These curtains must be changed. This blue will not suit my scheme of colour, and it is too hard and crude in itself; and this yellow

border is inadmissible, even as things are.'

'Lo ye now!' said Miles, all in amaze. 'And I, who thought these curtains tip-toppers! They cost a power of money, so they should be something good. And th' stuff on them is of the best—that I know.'

He rubbed the heavy silk between his finger and thumb as affectionately as a man pulls a dog's ears.

'The material is handsome, but the colour is bad,' said Charlie with a shudder.

'Lo ye now!' said Miles again, screwing up his eyes a little ominously, and making a deprecatory kind of click with his tongue.

'And the carpet will not do,' continued Charlie. 'This fiery red will kill everything. And the chairs and sofas are not right; the shapes and coverings are both wrong.'

'Ay! them's all wrong too?' said Miles, with unwonted quietness.

'Quite wrong,' said Charlie, deceived by appearances and giving the reins to his hobby-horse. 'The ottomans, too, are just impossible—and that modern china is dreadful. And you

cannot have those heavy cut-glass chandeliers. You cannot have gas in the room at all.'

He grew warmer as he went on—his artistic taste was so thoroughly outraged.

'Oh, Miles, man alive, it's just a wicked waste of money!' cried Nancy, unable to contain herself longer. 'All this here, that's as good as new, as a body might say, and as fine as five-pence, to be carted off for a whim that's to do no good to anyone. It's just shameful, and I'll say it were it ever so. It'll not bring a blessing on thee, Miles, to scatter thy brass in this wild gate, and so I tell thee.'

'Nay, but I think the wife is about right,' said Miles, speaking very slowly, for he was truly aghast at the wholesale condemnation of his grand room. He and the local upholsterer had furnished it between them; for he had loyally done his best to give all of his own a lift, and neither cost nor material had been spared. And now to have it touched with this cruel spear that blackened and blighted wherever it struck. It was more than he could stand: and Nancy, woman, was about right. The

paper he would not stand out for, nor, for the matter of that, would she. She had never liked the mauve-fleshed young woman with nothing on but a scarf in a bow above her head and in a line down her shoulders; and that lumpy Cupid, made of apples strung together and as naked as when he was born, had always shocked her sense of what a well-conditioned bairn should be. But when it came to the curtains and the carpets, the sofas and the chairs, that huge cut-glass chandelier with its drops like diamonds, the tables and ornaments—in fact, to every individual thing in the big room—then Miles himself paused and faltered before he took the leap. He did not care about the money the change would cost. Quite the contrary. What he did care for was the slap in his face in the matter of taste, and the condemnation of things he had learned not only to connect with his prosperity, but to regard as the dumb witnesses of his own merit.

‘It is a clean sweep, anyhow,’ he went on to say, his colour rising as he spoke. ‘We have been content and pretty proud, Nancy and me

and the lad, with what we have had ; and I don't like the looks of turning one's back on all of one's own for the word of a stranger who doesn't feel with us—and maybe has other thoughts,' he added darkly. 'So I think, Mr. Osborne, sir, we'll sleep on this matter before we make a serious calculation.'

'Of course, that is just as *you* wish,' said Charlie coldly.

'Well, you see, I'm a little out of breath and flabbergasted ; and I'm not so sure as I'd like all these changes when made ; and I'd like to see a proof before I paid,' said Miles. 'One doesn't do so well to give oneself up too soon into the hands of a stranger as has other thoughts,' he repeated.

'Oh !' said Charlie, with all a gentleman's pride and artist's disdain in his voice and manner ; 'if you do not think I understand my own business, we had better not say any more about it. In such a thing as this I must have *carte-blanche* or none at all.'

'I don't know what you mean about carts nor barrows neither,' shouted Miles, thoroughly

nettled; 'but if you think you are a-going to ride roughshod over me, young man, you are mistaken, Mr. Osborne, sir, and so I tell you. It is me as pays, and me as has to be agreeable to this, that, and t'other—not for a stranger to come in and order shifts and gangs, and set the seams as he has a mind, and never a body to say him nay. Not if I know it—and now you know.'

'Whisht, Miles—whisht, honey!' said Nancy in a terrified voice.

'Hold hard, father,' said Caleb with unwonted decision.

'Nay, but I'll have my say if I die for it!' said Miles, his voice raised to its angry bellow. His thumbs were thrust deeper into his waistcoat pockets, and the tattoo played by his coarse fingers was no longer spread and jocund, but with hard, jerky, irritated taps—his fingers coming down on the flaring flowers with blows like miniature sledge-hammers.

'You have said enough,' said Charlie. 'Nothing you could offer me would induce me to accept this work, and I wish you good-day.'

‘ And good-day to you, sir, for a jackadandy, if ever there was one !’ shouted Miles ; while Nancy besought the young gentleman to take a snack, and Caleb went with him to the door, saying he must not mind what father had said—father’s bark was worse than his bite, and Mr. Osborne was not to feel offended—he knew so much better than father, he could afford to let him rave.

He spoke with so much good feeling—with the dignity even of earnestness and sincerity—that Charlie could not but recognize the poor scoundrel’s partial value ; and, though he went off in a fluff and a fume, he thought that, after all, worse men were in the world than Caleb Stagg, who, creature as he was, was yet a good fellow in his own detestable way.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW IT CAME ABOUT.

STILL boiling with indignation—in a fluff and a fume all through—Charlie Osborne walked on to the Dower House, where he hoped to see Lady Elizabeth and Estelle. Since the collapse of her notable scheme for her daughter's endowment with unhappiness and wealth, Mrs. Clanricarde had in a manner let go the reins, laid down the whip, and given the girl her head. She had more liberty because less care was taken of her; Mrs. Clanricarde feeling, as people do who are disappointed, that if she wanted to go to destruction she must, and it was too hard a task to restrain her. This phase, however, would not last long. It was only the first inevitable

reaction following on baffled endeavour. Very soon the managing, putting-to-rights nature of a *maîtresse femme* would reassert itself, and then the slackened rein would be all the more sharply drawn because of this temporary relaxation. Meanwhile Estelle, being but a maid of mortal mould, made good use of her increased liberty; and Charlie Osborne profited. Means of meeting were found every day, while the mother sat behind the close-drawn blinds of Les Saules, and broke the vials of her wrath over the head of her unlucky George.

It had been already arranged between the young lovers that they were to meet at the Dower House to-day, by that lucky chance which is part of the craft and diplomacy of love. Thus Charlie felt sure of falling in with Estelle somewhere about the place, should Lady Elizabeth be out—which was not likely, as he knew she would be anxious to hear the result of her recommendation.

So it all proved. Lady Elizabeth was at home in her own private ‘work-room,’ and Estelle Clanricarde was with her, sitting as her

model for the head of Ruth gleaning in the fields of Boaz;—at which the dear lady was working with as much zeal as if painting was her profession.

‘Well!’ said Lady Elizabeth, after the first greetings were over; ‘and what about the commission?’

‘Oh!’ said Charlie, tossing up his handsome head; ‘it has come to nothing, of course!’

‘Why of course?’ and ‘Oh, Charlie!’ said the two girls in a breath. Lady Elizabeth’s large, limpid grey eyes expressed surprise—Estelle’s beautiful brown moths, regret.

‘Because I am a gentleman, Lady Elizabeth,’ said Charlie with infinite disdain; ‘and I could not consent to work for such scoundrels if I had not a penny piece in the world! I would rather buy a broom and sweep a crossing!’

‘Caleb Stagg is not a scoundrel,’ said Lady Elizabeth gently.

‘His father is, if he is not,’ broke in Charlie, with more heat than courtesy.

‘Rude, perhaps, and boorish, but I should scarcely call him a scoundrel,’ the lady again

insisted, as gently as before, but also as firmly.

‘In any case, how could I work for a wretch who has not the smallest rudiment of taste—who puts together the vilest and most immoral colours—prefers hideous forms to righteous ones—and knows no more of values than what is so much money worth! Lady Elizabeth, it is impossible!’

‘But you might be a missionary, and teach the heathen,’ continued the lady.

‘Can you teach pigs?’ retorted Charlie scornfully. ‘Besides, that old scoundrel insulted me. How could I accept a commission from a man who not only does not know one thing from another, but who also does not know how to behave with common decency? How should he!—a mere brute like that—a miner yesterday, and nothing but a miner to-day with a pot of money he would be far better without. Such a trio as they are! I declare they made me ashamed of my own species.’

‘We cannot help their wealth,’ said Lady Elizabeth. ‘They have the money, you see, and it was honestly earned; so they must keep

it. But, if we could make them distribute it wisely, that would be a gain to everyone alike. That was what I thought of when I proposed this room to them and to you. I thought that it would be both a noble piece of work for the future occupier of Redhill, if the present would scarcely appreciate it at its full value—and that you would be the gainer by so much, and,' looking at Estelle, 'would be so much nearer your happiness.'

'I know all that, dear Lady Elizabeth,' said Charlie, feeling more contrite than he cared to express, but resolved to fight it out on his chosen lines of dignity and gentlehood; 'and you may be sure it cost me something to turn my back on what would have been a splendid bit of work all through. But, believe me, I could not! It would have been impossible! and neither you nor Estelle would have wished it had you understood all the conditions.'

'I am sure you did right, Charlie,' put in Estelle hastily. Not for worlds would she let him see that she was disappointed or in any way doubted the absolute wisdom of his action. 'As

Charlie says, it would have been impossible,' she added.

A tender smile, a little tinged with sadness, crossed Lady Elizabeth's face. The three years that lay between her and Estelle, as well as the difference in their characters, gave her the air and sentiment of far more experience than perhaps the reality warranted. But experience is sometimes, as it were, forestalled—foreseen—by the qualities of the character; and Lady Elizabeth's—thoughtful, self-controlled and intense—had a grip and an outlook of more value than is got by such heady impulsiveness as that which ruled Charlie Osborne's life, or such weakness to her affections as was Estelle's governing motive.

'Well, we must think of something else as this has failed,' said the lady, after a pause. 'I must try to get you a commission—' to Charlie, with one of her charming, generous smiles, meaning to say that she was in no wise offended by this rejection of her first efforts. 'I am determined you shall succeed,' she went on to say playfully; 'and I feel strong enough

to conquer fortune for you. We will introduce you to Mr. Smythe Smith. He is coming down to stay with us for a few days; and perhaps that will be a better thing for you in the end than this would have been. But this would have kept you here—which was a consideration;’ looking at Estelle as girls do when they are sympathetic with a love-affair.

‘It cannot be helped,’ said Charlie, still mounted on his very highest horse. ‘Essential as money is to me, I cannot barter for it my self-respect; and to have worked for this old ruffian, and for such a house of horrors, would have been to practically sell myself. Art, to be worthy of its high mission, ought to be worthily represented,’ he added loftily. ‘In this deplorable age of ours the artist is the only true priest, and he must be equal to his office.’

‘Yes,’ said Estelle, her soft eyes full to overflowing with that kind of love which stirs a man’s inmost soul—the love that unites intellectual obeisance with spiritual adoration and personal fondness—the love that makes of the lover a hero and a demi-god to himself—the

love on which artists and poets live as the enchantress Maimouna lived on the breath of flowers, as birds of paradise are intoxicated with the dews of heaven—that love of all the most dangerous both to her who gives and to him who receives. The one it robs of self-respect and a higher standard; the other it robs of a god greater than himself.

‘Yes,’ said Lady Elizabeth. ‘But there is also something grand in being nobler than one’s own pride,’ she added. ‘Self-forgetfulness has its own splendour, has it not? And I always think that line of George Herbert’s, “Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,” might be used as a rule of conduct more often than it is.’

‘That is a very different thing from doing artist’s work for human pigs, and taking money from a ruffian who does not know how to behave,’ said Charlie. ‘I would be as humble as anyone to true greatness. I am. I reverence every word that the Master says,’—(‘Even when he curses all travellers by railways?’ put in Lady Elizabeth)—‘and I should not dream of opposing his dictum in anything,’ continued

Charlie, not noticing; 'but that is quite another thing. To reverence true greatness and knuckle under to wealthy ruffianism do not come into the same category, dear Lady Elizabeth.'

'Do not call it ruffianism, Charlie,' she answered. 'Call it ignorance. I daresay Mr. Stagg did not know that he was behaving badly. He acted only after the law of his kind.'

'Yes,' said Charlie grandly; 'that is just it. He acted after the law of his kind—like a brute; and I after that of my kind—like a gentleman. He insulted me, and I repudiated him.'

Lady Elizabeth got up and went over to the young artist. His handsome face was flushed, but set and stern with indignation; hers—that tender Madonna face—was pale, and, as it were, quivering and instinct with something that was more sublime than pity, more noble than sympathy.

'Who was it said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"?' she said with infinite feeling. 'Oh, Charlie, the longer I live, the more and more deeply I feel the need we have in ourselves of forgiveness, and the duty

laid on us of forgiving others! It is not forgiveness so much as understanding. If we could see into a person's heart and all round a circumstance, we should never be angry. At the worst, we should be only sorry!

'Lady Elizabeth, you are an angel,' said Charlie, moved by her earnestness, but not taking fire at her flame. 'I am only a weak sinful man, and I cannot follow you in your higher flights. You can be patient where I cannot. We are not all made of the same material; and mine is less ethereal than yours.'

Lady Elizabeth took herself back with a nervous little laugh.

'I daresay I am silly and exaggerate things,' she said hurriedly. 'Eustace says I do; but I should like to see certain principles more acted on; and this of forgiving others—tolerating ugly appearances, and not taking offence easily—is one of them.'

'Then would you have me pocket the affront, and take the commission simply for the gain?' asked Charlie, his handsome face again flushing.

‘No, not unless you could have seen the thing from my standpoint,’ was her reply. ‘I would never wish anyone to do what seemed to him mean or degrading.’

‘You would only wish me to do what was mean and degrading from another platform—blinded by another set of motives?’ said Charlie.

It was Lady Elizabeth’s turn now to flush. A transient gleam of reproach darkened the tender radiance of her soft grey eyes. But it passed as quickly as it came.

‘Of course, it all depends on the way in which we look at things,’ she said quietly; and Charlie, rather ashamed of himself, but too proud to confess it, said ‘Yes,’ just as quietly. Which ended the conversation, and decomposed all the thoughts that had created it.

‘But,’ as Charlie said to Estelle afterwards, ‘but that I really love Lady Elizabeth like my sister, I should get provoked at her ultra ideas. I am, I hope, as high-minded as any man, and would scorn to do a mean or pitiful action as much as anyone, but really I cannot follow her

—and no one could! It is just Utopia that she imagines. It would be the millennium if it were all true; and that is ridiculous.’

‘Yes,’ said Estelle; ‘and yet’—loyalty to her friend colouring even her submission to her lover—‘she is so good! She is an angel!’

‘That’s just it,’ said Charlie; ‘she is more of an angel than a woman; and I confess I like women better than angels! I know one, however, who is both!’ he added fondly.

Whereon they started off into the mellifluous babble of love, and forgot all in the delight of the moment and the joy of the hour.

A few days after this Mr. and Mrs. Smythe Smith, the new millionaires, came down to visit Lord and Lady Kingshouse; and Lady Elizabeth, this transparent and angelic creature, laid her kindly traps and baited them as deftly as Mrs. Clamricarde herself could have done. She spoke to Mrs. Smythe Smith of their clever and delightful young artist, of his beautiful ideas, his delicate fancies, his original genius, his certainty of future fame. He was at the right moment for plucking by a far-seeing and intelligent patron.

It would be a proud thing to be able to say in future time : ' I made this now famous genius ! ' It was always such a grand thing to be the patron of as yet undiscovered talent ! Mr. Osborne would make a quite unique monument—a perfectly beautiful success of their magnificent house. She hoped they would think of it ; for a beautiful thing is in very truth a joy for ever, and does the world so much good ! And, if only for the delight she had in beauty and perfectness, she would like them to have Mr. Osborne's work in their place. And so on. But it must always be remembered that Lady Elizabeth did really believe all this of her old friend and childish playmate, and that she was in no wise touting for the good of a mediocrity to the damage of a Croesus.

Mr. Smythe Smith said he would rather prefer a man of known repute—a man whose name alone would add lustre to his worth, and cause the envious world to admire without cavil. Mrs. Smythe Smith, on the other hand, inclined to the undiscovered genius, whom also she thought she could a little deflect, if not bully and make

subservient to her wishes. It would then be 'we.' 'Mr. Osborne and I planned this room—made out this decoration—arranged these details. I proposed this colour ; I worked up that subject ; and I found Mr. Osborne most civil and obliging—most ready to adopt my suggestions and carry them out.'

Yes, she was certainly on the side of the undiscovered genius ; and as Mr. Smythe Smith knew that it was good form to give way to a wife before folk, he yielded the point in this instance, and Mrs. Smythe Smith stuck to it. Whence it came to pass that Charlie Osborne and his portfolio were had up to the Dower House, when the designs he had made at Lady Elizabeth's suggestion were looked at, admired, criticized, and pronounced eminently workable and satisfactory.

For the look of the thing, and to maintain an independent attitude as well as to sustain their character as people of taste, judgment and discernment, Mrs. Smythe Smith made one suggestion and Mr. Smythe Smith another—of no vital importance and touching no organic prin-

ciple ; and Charlie Osborne was too well-bred to object to modifications which pleased the pride of those who made them and hurt nothing that was essential to his own ideas.

His manners and appearance both impressed the wealthy parvenu and his wife to a high degree of favour. That air he had of semi-royal dignity sat so well on his extremely handsome person ; his voice was so melodious ; his eyes were so very fine ; his hands were so perfectly well-shaped—the hands emphatically of a gentleman ; Lady Elizabeth was so friendly ; the countess was so almost maternal—she was in the plot and took to it as naturally as a duckling to the water ; what woman would not ?—my lord was so good-humouredly familiar—glad to follow his dear Delight's lead and to do as she desired—all these considerations stirred the brains of Mr. and Mrs. Smythe Smith like sweet must in new wine, so that the bargain was made and the arrangement come to without boggling or delay. And before Charlie Osborne well knew where he was, or all that it included, he had agreed to leave Kingshouse

and Estelle and go to London with the Smythe Smiths for the art-decoration of their magnificent house in Piccadilly. The whole future of the drama hung on this one apparently unimportant act. Had he taken the Redhill commission and stayed where he was, the story of his life and Estelle's would have been completely changed.

CHAPTER XVII.

PANEM ET CIRCENSES.

IN this queer life of ours, with its intricacies of sacrifice and its interdependence of circumstances, no pleasure comes to one without pain to another. As in social ordering the helot makes the aristocrat, so from the smiles of the endowed spring the tears of the bereaved. The wedding-wreath is gathered from the rose-trees on the grave; the mother suffers that the child may rejoice; the accumulated wealth of one comes from the loss or toil of many; and all work by which mankind has benefited has cost blood and treasure and the burden of such grave care as must needs go with endeavour. Gethsemane is the mirror of the world and co-

eval with the ages; and the stream of those who pass through the gates of its mournful garden is as large as life itself.

Now, here at Kingshouse in a small way and with narrow borderings, was enacted the old familiar drama of gain and loss. The 'panem et circenses' offered to Charlie meant banyan days in the house of happiness to Estelle; and Love suffered equally with each because Prosperity took up the running with one. There was this consolation, however—Charlie's prosperity would eventually be Estelle's happiness; for, of course, she was as fixed in her determination to wait for him, all her life if need be, and never marry another come what might—as fixed as those stars in the sky, which somehow seemed her sympathizers and confidantes when her mother was acrid and Charlie invisible.

Their parting was in secret, as their meetings had been. When the handsome young Detrimental called at Les Saules to salve over old sores and blot out old scores, he saw Mr. and Mrs. Clanricarde only. Estelle was in the wood,

and her mother was not too curious as to her daughter's whereabouts. She was too grateful to providence and Mr. Smythe Smith to grudge a few crumbs of content to the poor little dove who was to be the sacrifice. Believing as she did in the transforming power of change and absence, she trusted in these to destroy the love into which the old boy and girl affection had developed. Besides, the chapter of accidents for a beautiful young creature like Estelle has a broad margin. Hence, she could afford to be quite humane to Charlie Osborne when he came to take his leave of them all; and she even condescended to speak of Estelle's absence as something in which he might be supposed to take an interest. It was a folly well over, she thought—something like measles or nettlerash, or haply scarlatina, and she did not foresee 'sequelæ.'

Hidden in the wood from all eyes but those friendly ones of the Great Mother, poor Estelle was breaking her heart, yet doing her best not to be too selfish in her sorrow. It was for Charlie's good in every way that he should have this splendid commission; and she knew

as well as he that it was for her good too in the end. Were not their lives essentially one, although to all appearance as yet divided? Still, the moment was bitter, and Estelle was not ashamed to suffer. But all things came to an end. 'Tout casse, tout lasse, tout passe,' says the melancholy French proverb; and sorrow itself stumbles slowly forward to oblivion as anguish creeps onwards to death. Tears and protestations—the kisses consecrated to pain and those which are pledges of future joy—farewells repeated solemnly as the last, then, lost and confounded in another embrace—smiles which are sadder than tears, and assurances which somehow carry no weight and bring no content—who that has ever loved does not know the whole diapason of this suffering, the whole sad framing of this threnody? Those two young creatures in the wood went through the old familiar tragedy; and then the moment came when they must absolutely part—his face turned to the mighty world of London, where he should find the grand anodyne of work and the noble stimulus of active en-

deavour—she to the restricted life of home where her mother would not be her friend and her father might not. But so it is. The weak one is ever singled to ‘endure what it once possessed;’ and while the men dare and die the women live and weep.

Spring and summer, and even autumn itself, had fled now for Estelle. It was the winter of her soul. Her lover was away and the sun had gone out of her sky. She would have felt it in a certain sense treacherous to her great trust had she been even moderately happy in his absence. To have been gay would have been impiety. She carried her sorrow as the Christians of old times carried the sign of their faith, hidden within her breast, but ever to be made visible to those who should care to pluck it forth. She gave up society, and found the vicarage parties the very haunts of dulness and the homes of ennui. She suddenly became miserly of time, and her diligence at home was really edifying to the whole household. She was very sweet and good to her mother; submissive to the last degree in all small matters,

as if wanting to atone for her disobedience in that one, the largest and most important of all ; making up by pennyworths for the transference of the whole capital. She got up early and she did a vast amount of needlework ; but here and there, when the colours were not quite fast, there were blotches as if the thread had ‘run’ and stained the cloth.

Her extreme docility touched Mrs. Clanricarde, who was by no means a bad-hearted woman, though she was what we call concretely Worldly—with cause enough, poor soul ! But though it touched her on one side, it made her suspicious and watchful on another, for she understood to a nicety that art of making up by pennyworths when the main capital has been squandered. Was she not accustomed to it from her husband ?

This suspiciousness, however, was not suffered to appear. Mrs. Clanricarde was far too clever to spoil the whole brew for want of a little sugar. Nor was she in any sense an unnatural mother, indifferent to her daughter’s love and careless of her happiness. On the contrary, it

was because she honestly believed this happiness was to be found in the long-run in money rather than in love, that she had opposed Charlie Osborne and taken up with Caleb Stagg—a better not being at hand. She responded then to all Estelle's sweet little advances with sympathetic acceptance; and went half way to meet her. She never alluded to the late cloud that had been between them, nor to him whose shape it bore. She seemed to have forgiven and even forgotten that little episode about Caleb Stagg, with all the disappointment it had brought, and to have wiped it off the slate of life's past transactions altogether. She looked narrowly after the post, and let her daughter receive all Charlie's letters unintercepted—knowing that to have prevented these first deliveries would have simply created an underground post-office, where she would have had no supervision. What she would do in the future was another matter altogether. She believed in the Fabian policy of weakening by delay, and that 'Les absents ont toujours tort.' But as matters were for the moment, all things stood on velvet,

and, save for that wolf of impecuniosity prowling ever more closely round the door, one would have said that the household at Les Saules was in better case than it had been for months past—indeed, ever since handsome Charlie Osborne had come down from London to translate his boyish affection into a man's conscious passion, and Estelle had passed from a maidenhood as undisturbed as Bonnie Kilmeny's into one besieged, possessed and overmastered by love.

Meanwhile, Charlie Osborne found his place in London one after his own heart. Had he had the ordering of things he could not have framed a better pattern. The Smythe Smiths were charming people—for parvenus. Of course, they were pretentious. That is the very essence of the condition. For, being afraid to show ignorance, and not knowing into what circles of knowledge high-bred people are in a manner born, the parvenu assumes to know everything, and makes bad shots in consequence. But they were substantially sensible people, and amenable. To apparently yield was in reality to direct; as Charlie soon found out, and sagely

acted on. When Mrs. Symthe Smith made her suggestions—which were blemishes, and Mr. Smythe Smith made his—which were suicidal, the young artist accepted them as though they were absolutely worth considering. He began by praising them *en bloc*, and ended by deftly whittling them away to nothing. But he made the renunciation come from them, as their own spontaneous decision, and so saved their self-love, his own credit, and the harmony of his ideas unbroken. Then, they were generous people, and spared no expense in any direction. And next to the pleasure of spending one's own money is that of manipulating other people's—a pleasure of which Charlie was keenly conscious, and by no means shy in its use. Mrs. Smythe Smith, too, a showy, well-preserved woman on the right side of forty, had taken an immense fancy for this handsome artist, guest and friend. She called herself his mother, and treated him with as much affection as she treated her own son, Lawrence—a tall, well-built young athlete of twenty, who looked more like her younger brother than her son. She petted him greatly,

and made much of him in all ways. She flattered him both delicately and deliciously; and yielded to his opinion with that mixture of dignity and tenderness which no young man alive can resist. Not Estelle herself touched that irritable self-love of his with a softer hand than did this wealthy parvenue whom Charlie himself was not ashamed to own as his patroness.

On his side Mr. Smythe Smith was just as kind, just as satisfactory. He had taken to heart Lady Elizabeth's hint about discovering genius and making a great artist's career, and he was resolved that Charlie Osborne should have his way made in royal fashion. He was building his own monument in this potential fame of the as yet unfledged phoenix. When Charlie should be Sir Charles and the President of the Royal Academy, it would be in everyone's mouth how the great Mr. Smythe Smith had seen his power from the first, had dug him out from obscurity and given him his first job. Mæcenas has come down to posterity together with the great men he feasted and patron-

ized ; and he, Mr. Smythe Smith, would play the part of a modern Mæcenas, beginning with Charlie Osborne. So that, as may be seen, everything went well for the lover of Estelle Clanricarde ; and even Lawrence, who did not care a pennypiece for friezes or dados, peacocks or sunflowers, had a younger comrade's admiration for the artist, who was a gentleman and a good fellow all round. And he did not grudge either his salary or his command of the governor's money, seeing that he had as much as he wanted for himself ; nor yet did he grudge him the mater's affection, seeing that he was too much occupied in making his own experience out of doors to be very observant of things at home.

To do Charlie justice, nothing of all this touched his fidelity to Estelle. It was intoxicating and delightful enough ; but it swept over his senses rather than his heart, and captivated his vanity more than his love. He did not make the mistake of supposing that Mrs. Smythe Smith's very pronounced affection for him meant more than it assumed to mean. It never occurred to him to ' try it on ' with the wife of

his patron, who was also his host and friend; nor to imperil his advantageous present for the dangerous excitement of a possible intrigue. He was also wise enough to know that the patron is always more or less the lion, while the patronized is correspondingly the mouse. Hence, he never allowed himself to feel secure to the extent of taking liberties—which also were not, in his code, permitted to true gentleness. And he was a conscientious worker—more especially when his heart was in his work, as now, when every success he scored was to the good of the future and brought him so much the nearer to Estelle. He never forgot her, and wrote to her at the first frantically and frequently—as time went on, with the most lovely and consoling regularity, but not so often, and with less of the poison of despair and more of the honey of hope in his letters. He was evidently cheerful to happiness and full of rose-coloured schemes for the future. He told Estelle all that he was doing, and sent her little thumb-nail sketches of his principal ideas. This associated her with him, and kept

the bond between them unbroken and unstrained; and though she was too sweet and loving to be either jealous or suspicious, exacting or insistent, still this voluntary confidence and strict association made her very happy—so far as a girl separated for an indefinite time from the man she passionately loves, and with whom her engagement is in secret and against her mother's permission, can be said to be happy in any sense.

So time passed, and the autumn and the winter flowed once more into the spring, and still things were exactly where they were. The grand house in Piccadilly was now almost finished, and the Smythe Smiths would soon move into it. Charlie had made a good 'hatfull' of money, as he phrased it, and he had been careful—for a young artist—and not extravagant. He had looked on it as a nest-egg and treated it as such; seeing in it fair shapes of home and wife, of fame and fortune, and reverencing it for what it was set aside to bring. But a thunderbolt fell out of the blue; and a cloud at first no bigger than a man's hand soon

swept over the whole sunny south. Charlie's health, which had long been giving Mrs. Smythe Smith uneasiness, though he himself made light of her fears, suddenly gave way with a run, and a broken blood-vessel brought him to the brink of the grave and kept him there for some time.

As no one knew of his engagement to Estelle Clanricarde, there was no one to write and tell her what had happened, nor what was the reason of this sudden cessation of letters. The poor girl fretted herself ill in sympathy with her absent lover; feeling sure that it was illness with him, and in no wise treachery nor desertion. At her instance, Lady Elizabeth took it on herself to write to Mrs. Smythe Smith, making general inquiries as to the work, and whether they were not pleased with their artist, and when would it be finished, &c., &c. All meaning the one simple little question: 'Why has not Charlie Osborne written for so long to Estelle Clanricarde?'

Then Mrs. Smythe Smith answered, and the sorrowful truth came out. They were more

than pleased, she said, with all that Mr. Osborne had done for them, and felt they could never repay Lady Elizabeth for her recommendation. Mr. Osborne was not only a delightful artist, but he was a most charming young man ; and they had all taken him into their affections as if he had been a member of their family. Unfortunately his health had broken down, and that very seriously. But he was mending, and the doctor said he would soon be patched up sufficiently to be moved. He would never be a very robust man, but he would probably quite recover from this failure ; and as soon as he was able to bear it they were going to put him on board their steam yacht, and send him round the world with their son. A long sea-voyage to cooler latitudes in summer and warmer in winter would reinstate him entirely ; and they hoped when he returned that he would bring back a stock of strength to last him for all his life after.

Here, then, the secret was explained, and poor Estelle knew of what material her heavy cross was made.

There was no help for it. Nor tears nor prayers can stay the tide, put back the hand of time, nor make that broken blood-vessel as good as new without absence, care, and long delay. As things were, it was a merciful ordering of providence that Charlie had such good friends—people both able and willing to help him in his day of need. Had he been as he was last year, alone in lodgings with only that hundred a year to fall back on—with occasional remittances from an unknown hand, sent for the last four or five years regularly but not to be counted on—his fate might have been very different. Now, all that could be done had been and would still be done; and this voyage would be perhaps the turning-point in his physical health as this commission had been that of his fortune.

So Lady Elizabeth argued, doing her best to comfort poor Estelle, who, unselfish and unexact as she might be, yet felt as if this voyage were the doom of her eternal separation, and that she should never more see her beloved. Hope lay dead at her feet, and happiness was

but a broken bubble. Her life was widowed; her soul was sunk into eternal mourning. Henceforth she had only memory and her own eternal faith. For she would die as she was now—devoted to Charlie and to Charlie only.

All this she replied to her friend's more cheerful arguments, and Lady Elizabeth could not help her. She, as must we all, had to dree her own weird and bear her own burden; and solace from without there was none. Charlie going away for perhaps a year, perhaps two—ill, unseen, unkissed, bearing with him only her heart and all her joy—what solace could she have? Not even her mother's increased tenderness made amends for this supreme loss; and so the blackness came, and what had been only the twilight of hope unfulfilled was now the midnight of despair, and a darkness which no star melted and not even a meteor illumined.

BOOK THE SECOND.

MIDNIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW TRUSTEE.

IN the county where they lived the Harfords had that character for eccentricity which belongs to all people of originality of thought or marked individuality of character. Strong, energetic, undisciplined, as lads they ran away from school—as men they shot big game and sought adventures in the wilds. Some of them were explorers, and added the source of a river or the exact latitude of a mountain to the possessions of geography. Some of them tried the north-west passage, and died of cold and starvation on the ice; and others, to whom savages were no more men and brothers than so many rats and mice, were killed by poisoned arrows on a South-Sea island when they did not die of fever in a man-

grove swamp or were not eaten by crocodiles in the river. As a family, they had gone all over the world, seen every kind of life and died every kind of death. Even the heirs to the estate had, more than once, set the pleasures of wild adventures against the possession of a 'stake,' and found the 'stake' the lighter of the two. Not a Harford among them all had ever demeaned himself to commerce, to medicine, or to law. Some had gone into the army, and some into the navy; both of which services they generally managed to make somewhat too hot for them, and thus were either cashiered or given a roving commission, which allowed them more liberty of adventure than the regulars enjoyed. Sometimes, when they had kicked over the traces at home more recklessly than usual, they had enlisted as privates or gone as sailors before the mast; when, either their unruly spirit had been so far knocked out of them as to make them glad to be bought off and reduced to conventional conformity—or else they had deserted, to be caught and shot—or they had fled into space, to be never heard of again.

All sorts of wild traditions floated through the family annals. A white man had been heard of as a medicine-man of power among the Black-foot Indians—and he was a Harford. The most daring pirate in the Chinese seas was said to be an Englishman, and if so, who could he be but a Harford? The mysterious Europeans always turning up as Mohammedans, in turbans and baggy breeches, were Harfords to a man: and there was never a time when there was not a Harford, under another name, in the workhouse or in prison, driving a cab or sweeping a crossing. In short, they were the modern representatives of the Vikings, the knights-errant, the Crusaders, the Uscoques, the freelances of all times and nations. But they made good members of society when they did settle down; and as owners of the estate were as hard on poachers as if they were not of the same kidney themselves.

The Jack Harford who had just died had been in his youth quite up to the family traditions for wildness, which had not prevented his marrying a well-conditioned lady, who gave him two

children, and then no more. She died when young Anthony was about twelve years old and his sister Constance two years his junior; and next year the widower married again. Which second marriage, adding fuel to the fire of the wild Harford blood, sent Anthony off on his unauthorized travels when he was eighteen—whence he did not return till brought back by his father's death and his own inheritance.

For the first months more pressing business than that Aspline trusteeship took up his time and absorbed his attention. There was his father's widow to deal with; his half-brothers and sisters to see; their claims to look into—to dispute when he could, and to settle with as good a grace as might be when he could not. Not that he was close-fisted; but he had ever cherished that old resentment against the marriage which had landed him in the Wild West of America so soon as he had got his head; and he was reconciled to his step-mother no more now than before. He was a man with that close-set tenacity of feeling which creates a vendetta or heads a crusade, and is as likely to come

to the scaffold for crime as to the stake for heroism. Forgiveness was a virtue so hard as to have been hitherto impossible, and so distasteful as to appear to him a vice because a weakness; while revenge was the strong man's prerogative—the inalienable right of the injured. No man who had ever crossed Anthony Harford's path or inflicted on him any kind of loss or wrong, had lived long to celebrate his victory. But with all his fiery passions he had kept his masculine integrity without a flaw; and the man did not live who could say that Anthony Harford had 'ever funk'd or ever lied,' had hurt the defenceless, injured the innocent, or lured wife or maid to the undoing of her fair fame.

In the Border states and cities, where he had carried his life in his hand, he had been compelled into the line of action to which his inherited proclivities naturally drew him. There, where a man's virtue is still emphatically his courage and his manliness, passion reaching into ferocity is only a defect, and self-respect, quickly kindling into passion, is certainly a quality. To brook no impertinence; to wash

out an insult in blood ; to be the second to show and the first to draw ; to brush aside him who else will brush you aside ; to court no quarrel but to avoid none that courts you ; to respect all and demand respect from all, with revolver and bowie knife if need be—these are among the first principles of life in such lawless places as those where Anthony Harford had lived. And they were principles which accorded only too well with his own nature. But by this very lawlessness, this very necessity for self-defence, he had learned self-control.

When folks live in a powder magazine they are careful about fire ; and insolence or aggression among quick-tempered men, handy with their shooting-irons and unrestrained by law, is too dangerous a pastime to be often indulged in. Hence Anthony Harford had learned to watch himself as well as others, and his passions, which were once like unbroken steeds, were now those same steeds in harness, curbed, bitted and directed. But they were essentially the same creatures. It was only the training that was different. And, as we all know, harness will

sometimes break, and the best trained beast will sometimes take the bit between his teeth—and then farewell to all the arts of the manège!

His return to old scenes and the consciousness of responsibility, together with that invisible but omnipotent influence of public opinion, wrought, as might be expected, on Anthony. At first he did not like the change. After those boundless wastes, those pathless forests, those 'unharvested seas' of prairie land, those unscalable mountains crowned with eternal snow, those uninhabited regions where the snake hissed and the grizzly roamed, England seemed both painfully crowded and ludicrously small. To stand on a hill a few hundred feet above the plain and see the fields and farms mapped out below, gave him the impression of a child's toy a puzzle on a rather large scale, cunningly contrived and neatly fitted, but wanting in dignity and reality. His own place, beautiful as it was, seemed scarce large enough for a man's full breathing; and the details of management were pitifully mean and sordid and minute. To waste

words or give two thoughts to Dick's drain or Joe's chimney—to hesitate for a moment before ordering Tom's lean-to or Will's new barn—why, it all seemed the meanest thing out; and he acceded to this and that with a generosity of sweep which made his bailiff stand aghast, gatherer-in as he was of the numerous pickles which in the aggregate make a mickle. By degrees, however, the returned wanderer learnt the lesson of proportion, and narrowed the wide generosity of his first sweep to dimensions better fitted to home life. He no longer thought it shame to accept little rents of a few pounds a-year from labourers whose children went barefooted and whose cupboard often wanted bread. He held it as part of the obligations of his state as landlord and proprietor to higgler over every little improvement or repair needed by his tenants; and to force them, for the sake of the principle, to contribute so many shillings, on their own side—representing empty stomachs and shivering bodies, where he felt neither the outlay nor the saving more than he felt the weight of a fly on his shoulder. He was never a grasp-

ing landlord nor a greedy, and his name stood high in the county for largeness of generosity ; but he learnt to curb his natural instincts into exacter conformity with the public feeling and general action of his class, and something of the scent of the wild sage-bushes passed off him. But he retained certain characteristics and qualities gained by contact with lawlessness and association with danger ; and he added to the unmistakable carriage of an English gentleman that peculiar air of dignity, reserve and self-respect which sits like a garment on the shoulders of one used to the rough life of the Wild West.

Brave as a lion and as strong as he was brave ; handsome as a Greek bronze ; with the eyes of a scout and the port of a king ; supple as a panther and stately as a stag ; Anthony Harford was one to move all women's hearts to love—all men's eyes to admiration. Wherever he went a little cloud of whispered incense rose round him—and his face, figure, attitude, the way in which he stood and the way in which he looked, were all freely commented on, sometimes within ear-shot. Whether he heard or not his

commentators never knew. His face showed nothing. The erect bearing, statuesque and still; the keen eyes, watchful, expectant, waiting, never aggressive, never provocative, simply watchful and expectant; the immobile face, neither frowning nor smiling, not hard, not expressionless, but the face of one waiting for indications; all gave the new owner of Thrift a distinction which no man could either imitate or obscure. His manner, too, was on a par with his appearance, and was the active side of his bearing. He spoke to everyone in the same tone and with the same kind of dignified respect, which was but the expression of his own self-respect. The lord and the labourer received precisely the same measure. If the scent of the wild sage-bushes was slowly passing, the impress of the habit of equality remained. He neither kow-towed to superior greatness for his own part, nor demanded that the inferior should kow-tow to him. He reckoned men by their manhood, not by their possessions; and when the labourers were servile and his tenants too humble, his gorge rose against them, and he despised them

in proportion to the suppleness of their backs and the weakness of their knees. He expected even poverty to be self-respecting, and he was revolted when he saw the survival of serfdom and the taint of personal degradation, still remaining among his countrymen as the inheritance of poverty and the badge of class. But all this, too, wore away in time ; at least the outward expressions and manifestations wore away, and simply left him graver, more dignified, more austere even than the rest—but deprived of his expectations that his tenants should treat him as their equal and not as their superior—as a man and not a demi-god.

After he had got all his own affairs in smooth working order, Anthony Harford bethought himself of that trusteeship which he had to take up. The image of his fluffy little playmate and humanized puff-ball had often come before him like a pretty picture ; and he had as often laid that image aside till the more important matters connected with his succession had been settled. Now, however, he had leisure ; and his desire to renew those pleasant links between boyhood and

fairylund grew with that leisure and finally took the lead. He wrote to Mrs. Aspline a cold letter of business details. He began 'Dear madam,' and he ended 'truly yours.' But at the end he infused a little dash of humanity, well iced, by hoping that her daughter, Miss Aspline, was well, and desiring to be recalled to her memory. The letter was purposely made incomplete and somewhat disappointing. He thought it would probably bring a request for a personal interview, which was what he desired and was too proud to propose.

His little ruse had the desired effect. His letter piqued and annoyed Mrs. Aspline—it piqued and disappointed Anne.

'This man is going to give me worlds of trouble—I can see that!' said the mother, her face flushing seriously. 'He is as stupid as a boiled owl!' she added. Then she wished she had left out the boiled.

'He seems rather confused,' said Anne, following her mother's lead at a discreet distance, echoing her thought as faintly as the second rainbow repeats the first.

‘I shall have to go to London to consult Mr. Niemand,’ said Mrs. Aspline peevishly. ‘I should so much like to have another trustee! This savage will never do any good. I daresay he has forgotten his own language by now.’

‘He writes correctly,’ said Anne with an air of deliberation.

‘Oh! his bailiff wrote for him,’ said Mrs. Aspline with an air of conviction.

Her daughter smiled in that vague pretty way which may mean deprecation, assent, or amusement, just as you like to take it. And you take it according to your mood.

‘If I were not afraid of his habits I would ask him to come here, and we could talk matters over,’ said Mrs. Aspline, who hated trouble and dreaded travelling.

‘I dare say he would be bearable,’ returned Anne, who secretly wanted him to come and privately intended that he should be asked.

She had already woven two separate dreams out of the flimsy web of her fancy—the one that her old playmate had been a kind of corsair creature, like Conrad, for instance; a daring,

beautiful, reckless sort of unauthorised hero, ruthless to men, but as soft as satin and rose-leaves to women—a perverted but ever noble soul, whom she would bring back to conformity and the catechism, and so stand as the god-mother to his spiritual redemption. The other was, that he was a naïve and delightful savage, whom she would educate into the right use of his spoon and fork. A misty and indistinct recollection of some story she had once read somewhere, gave her this idea; and the name of Anthony Harford did as well as any other for her imaginary Huron. In any case she foresaw gleams of sunshine and streaks of prismatic colours across that rather dull sky of her daily life, should this new element of interest be introduced, and she hoped to imbue her mother with her desire so as to make it appear her own—as in general she was able to do.

‘It will scarcely do for us to present a savage to our friends,’ said Mrs. Aspline dubiously.

‘No,’ said Anne; ‘unless he amused them. And Kingshouse is so dull, perhaps it would brighten it up a little.’

‘But if he is horrid in his habits, Anne?’ objected her mother.

‘We must tell him,’ said Anne.

‘I am sure *I* would not!’ said Mrs. Aspline warmly.

‘I would if you liked,’ said Anne calmly.

‘Well, Anne, if you like to take the responsibility of the creature I am sure I do not mind,’ Mrs. Aspline returned after a moment’s pause. ‘Bad as he very likely is, Thrift is a lovely place, and the old family name is worth something, though the Harfords are such a queer lot. We are not responsible for him after all. He stands on his own feet. He is not like a nobody whom we introduced and vouched for. He is a Harford when all is said and done. So perhaps I may venture.’

‘I think you may,’ said Anne in her usual languid dreamy manner, though she could scarcely repress the smile which rose to her lips.

But it was not her way to be frank nor expansive. Her theory was to govern with concealed methods—holding the lever by which

the ship was quickened or slackened, but out of sight of all eyes and unfelt by all hands. With her mother she used these concealed methods more carefully than with any one else. She feared her jealousy—the jealousy of the reigning sovereign, ever ready to take umbrage at the heir-apparent, and to find freedom of action usurpation and the premature discounting of future powers. Mrs. Aspline had never quite forgiven her lord and master for that tightly-drawn will. She thought he might have left her daughter to her care, and not have tied-up the money as if she had been a swindler, or some unnatural mother who did not regard her daughter's interests as she ought. She had often fluffed and fumed to Anne over that provision of her father's will; and Anne knew exactly what she thought and how she felt. Hence the substantial reason for her discreet following, her repeating echo, her faint reproduction of her mother's moods and words while she had her hand on that lever by which the concealed machinery below was moved.

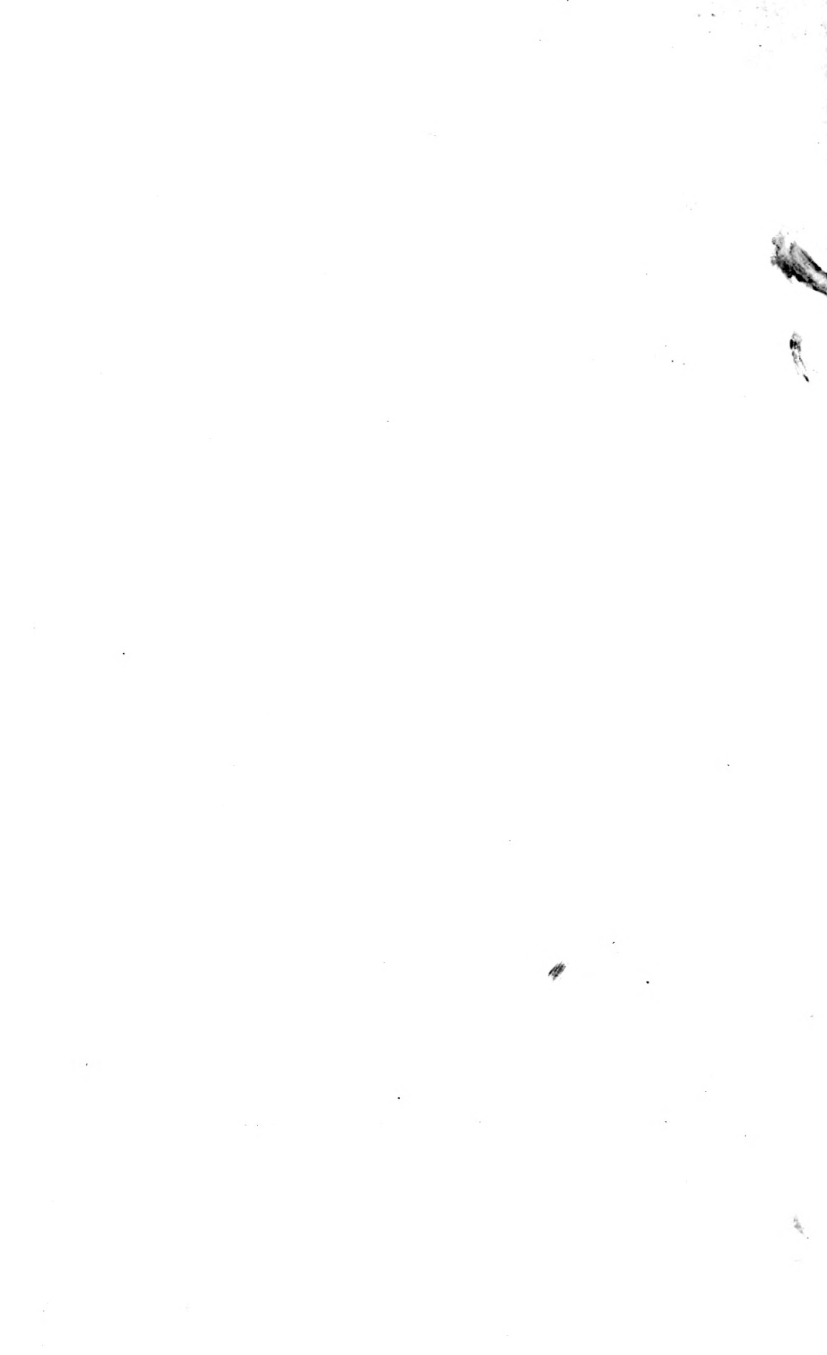
‘I think you may,’ she said languidly; ‘and,

as you say, he is a Harford, not an Aspline. Thrift condones a great many faults.'

Hence it came about that Anthony's wish was fulfilled, and that a letter of invitation was sent to him at Thrift—a letter almost as coldly worded as his own, and written in Mrs. Aspline's scratchy, fugitive kind of hand, which gave top loops to all her consonants and lower twists to all her vowels, and took four times as much space as one twice as large would have taken.

'Good,' said Anthony Harford when he received the letter. 'I will go next week. I wonder what I shall find—whether little Anne has grown into a bright girl or is a little cuss, and whether Cookey is as fat as she used to be when she gave me cakes and sweeties, and I thought her the prettiest lady in the county, who could beat the whole lot—hands down!'

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







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